

TURN ON TO J STREET ■ NEW LEFT WAS RIGHT ■ REBATES DON'T PAY

MAY 19, 2008

The American Conservative

VICTOR HUGO

Did Comrade Chavez
Win the Cold War?

I AM THE WALRAS

Many thanks to Nelson Hultberg for his cogent analysis, "The Case for Recession" (April 21). Yet Hultberg made a grave error when he wrote that an economy tending toward equilibrium "exists only in textbooks." The scientific mathematics of general-equilibrium theory pioneered by Leon Walras (1834-1910) has as much an economics pedigree as the admirable literary efforts of Austrian School figures such as Ludwig von Mises and Henry Hazlitt cited by Hultberg. Mises's Vienna teacher, Friedrich von Wieser, likened Walras's work to a map that "Does not copy nature but gives us a simplified representation of it; which is no misrepresentation but is such to sharpen our vision in view of the complexities of reality."

Walras's treatment of economic growth provides a more accurate picture of where the U.S. economy actually is than the "malinvestment" theory advanced by Hultberg and the modern Austrian School. Our senses should perk up when we hear or read Walras describing a "retrogressive" economy characterized by falling incomes and capitalists liquidating assets (thus a declining capital stock).

Free trade-inspired outsourcing, painfully and colorfully related by Tom Cairney in the same issue of *TAC* ("Bitter Pill"), could be creating a retrogressive economy through the movement of capital overseas. This would be a serious blow to the doctrines of Mises and others who champion free trade. Far from banishing general-equilibrium analysis to the textbooks, the work of Walras and his disciples should be taken out and studied vigorously anew.

JAMES MOSHER
Ledyard, Conn.

Nelson Hultberg replies:

Those who believe in a free market as a necessary requisite for a free society reject Walrasian "general equilibrium" theory because it tries to turn real humans into x's and o's on a graph by which we can plan our way to "perfect competition." This urge to plan is why it has always been the favorite of those who wish to centralize the state. (Walras was a socialist, by the way.)

As Mark Skousen points out in *The Making of Modern Economics*, the chief defect of Walrasian GE theory "is that it focuses on the [static] end result of competition rather than the [dynamic] process itself, how competition works." As a result, it gives us what historian Mark Blaug condemns as a "sterile innovation," which he compared to "a geographical map of the towns in a country without a map of the roads between towns."

Unfortunately, GE theory ignores the kaleidoscopic messiness of reality and the constant creative flux that comes from the nature of humans. The entrepreneurial mind moves economy, and individual creativity cannot be charted on a graph nor predicted by bureaucrats. Statists have been trying to do this for 150 years now with abominable results. Thus major theoretical gaps in reality plague Walrasian theory—the primary one being that it leaves out the ineffable human equation. Could this be why all collectivist/statist paradigms end up with such dreary and tyrannical societies?

WAR OF THE SEXES

In the April 7 edition, Kelley Beaucar Vlahos's article "Women at War" misses the point.

Men and women are different, and therefore some occupations are best reserved for one sex. In the military, as well as in police and fire departments, effi-

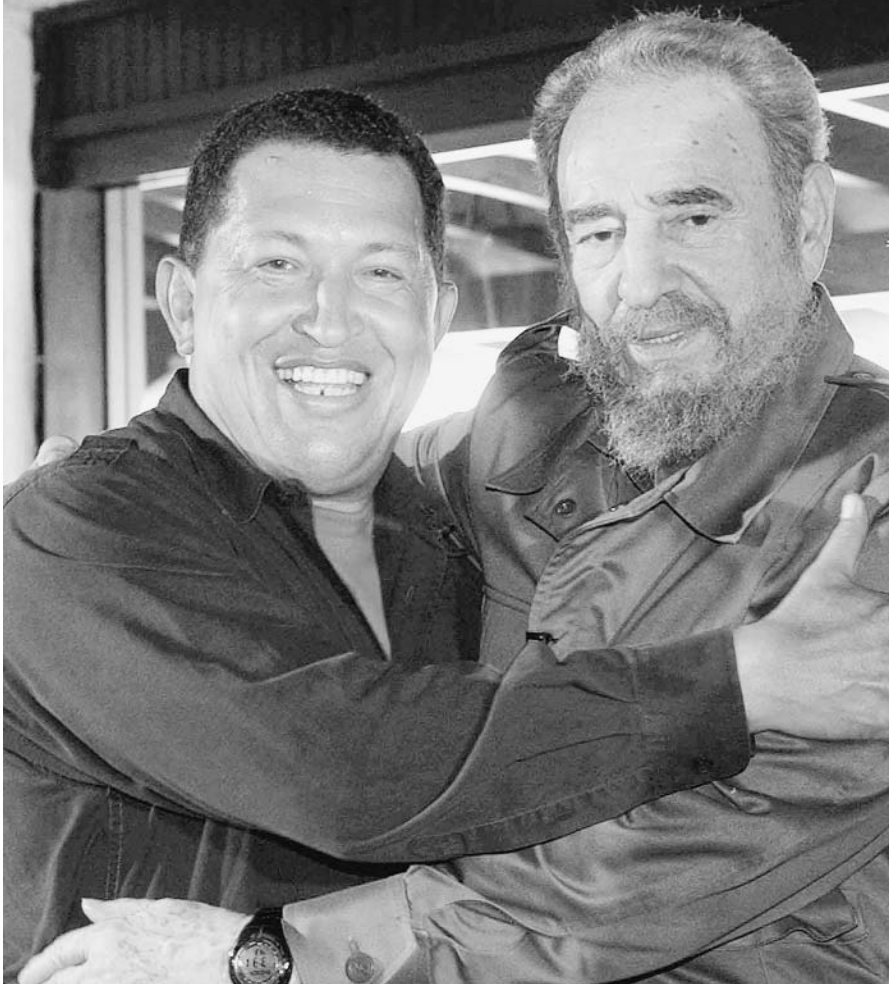
cient and sometimes heroic performance is achieved via small-unit cohesion. This cohesion is experienced by men who have participated as members of small groups in dangerous situations. Men develop a keen sense of honor and commitment to the group. In fact, as the late William Manchester wrote, cowards don't fear death, they fear failure in the eyes of their comrades. Mixing the sexes breaks this bond and atomizes the individuals to the detriment of the unit's mission. Women do not understand this because they don't get the same feelings within the proverbial ten-group as men do.

Men, ever challenging their relative status on the hierarchical structure, are driven by impulses that women cannot comprehend. And the same goes for men's understanding of women. Men can like a woman superior, but it is extremely rare for them to respect a woman as their superior. Conversely, they can dislike, even intensely, a male superior, yet have respect for that individual as their superior.

I read a few years ago someone's comment that "men do not put women in harm's way." For men *qua* men this is true. Has our society changed so much that purposely putting women in peril is now okay? Have American men lost their honor and women their virtue? If so, we will have lost more than unit effectiveness in dangerous situations.

RICK JOHNSON
Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

The American Conservative welcomes letters to the editor. Submit by e-mail to letters@amconmag.com, by fax to 703-875-3350, or by mail to 1300 Wilson Blvd., Suite 120, Arlington, VA 22209. Please include your name, address, and phone number. We reserve the right to edit all correspondence for space and clarity.



AFP LIVE

[COVER]

The Next Fidel

BY PETER HITCHENS Hugo Chavez's socialist program drives Venezuela to the brink of dictatorship. **Page 6**

[CULTURE]

When the Left Was Right

BY BILL KAUFFMAN Before the Weathermen detonated SDS, Carl Oglesby was trying to build a Middle-American movement. **Page 9**

[POLITICS]

Turning on to J Street

BY MICHAEL BRENDAN DOUGHERTY A new lobby redefines what it means to be a friend of Israel. **Page 18**

[LAW]

Less Perfect Unions

BY MARGARET LIU MCCONNELL Extending marriage to same-sex couples negates the ideal that no parent should abandon his child. **Page 23**

COLUMNS

22 Patrick J. Buchanan: McCain Goes Off Base

27 Daniel Larison: Obama's Snob Appeal

35 Fred Reed: Nothing to Fear but TSA Itself

NEWS & VIEWS

4 Fourteen Days: Peace Camp Wins War in North Carolina; Bin Laden Buttons; London Calls Boris Johnson

13 Deep Background: Hayden Gets With the Program; Israel's Nuclear Reaction

ARTICLES

14 Steve Sailer: Putting Wright to Rest

15 Lawrence Korb: The Iraq exit is clearly marked.

20 Dennis Dale: There's no such thing as a free rebate.

ARTS & LETTERS

28 Steve Sailer: Robert Downey Jr. in "Iron Man"

29 Peter W. Wood: *Against Happiness: In Praise of Melancholy* by Eric G. Wilson

31 Austin Bramwell: *Heads in the Sand: How the Republicans Screw Up Foreign Policy and Foreign Policy Screws Up the Democrats* by Matthew Yglesias

33 James P. Pinkerton: *Under God: George Washington and the Question of Church and State* by Tara Ross and Joseph C. Smith Jr.

[ELECTION]

GOP PEACENIKS

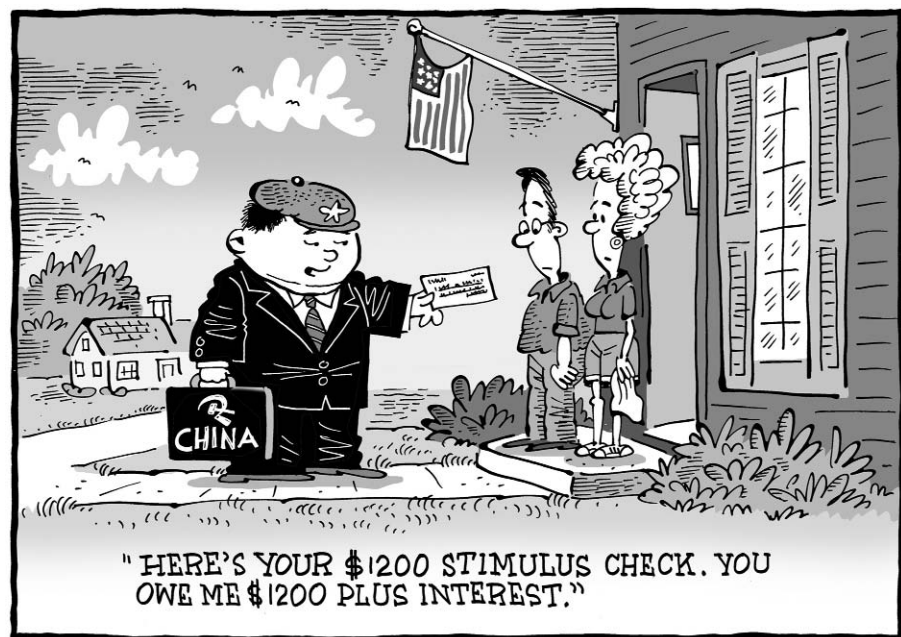
Buzzards circle Hillary Clinton as we go to press. Her exiguous 51-49 percent win over Barack Obama in the May 6 Indiana primary—and blowout 42-56 loss in North Carolina—had the commentariat preparing her obituaries. “This nomination fight is over,” said George Stephanopoulos. “We now know who the Democratic nominee is going to be,” Tim Russert agreed, “and no one is going to dispute it.” Except perhaps Senator Clinton, though she found the day after the primaries that she had become a virtual nonperson to the Democratic superdelegates who can decide the race.

Not all the action took place in the Democratic primaries, however. The GOP contests rendered a more certain verdict: John McCain is unacceptable to roughly a quarter of Republicans. In Indiana, the presumptive nominee took just 77 percent of his party’s vote. In North Carolina, he fared worse: Mike Huckabee, Ron Paul, and “no preference” held him down to 74 percent. The Democrats will not be the only party with unity problems heading into November.

For traditional conservatives, the North Carolina Republican primary was especially significant. Walter Jones—next to Ron Paul, the most outspoken conservative critic of the Iraq War—coasted to a 60-40 victory over his hawkish primary opponent, despite the intervention of the Club for Growth and other Beltway organizations on the challenger’s behalf.

Even more impressive, B.J. Lawson, a 33-year-old political neophyte running as an antiwar Republican, shut out his pro-war opponent, 70-30 percent, and will take on incumbent Democrat David Price in the fall.

By re-electing Jones, who faces only token opposition in November, and nominating Lawson, North Carolina Republi-



cans have proved there is a constituency in the GOP for a foreign policy very different from that of Bush and McCain. Traditional conservatives can take heart that whoever the other side’s nominee may be, at least in North Carolina, the Republican Party isn’t entirely lost.

[IMMIGRATION]

MCCAIN’S DOUBLETALK

“I got the message; you want us to secure the border first,” John McCain explained to Republican primary voters after the defeat of his amnesty bill. But having secured his party’s nomination, McCain is sending a different message to Hispanic voters.

On McCain’s new Spanish website, his Senate colleague Mel Martinez testifies to the passion of the maverick: “He defied the normal political convention, and he risked all to create an immigration law in this nation that would be fair for the nation and for those who are here out of status.” Translation: he defied the majority of Americans, the people from whom you seek employment and acceptance. You owe him.

This tactic of saying one thing in English and the opposite in another language is common—among Saudi princes. But the candidate who prides himself on straight talk should know better.

[WAR]

BIG BANG THEORY

Washington has been wondering whether the Bush-Cheney administration will try to go out with a bang, attacking Iran and leaving a larger Mideast inferno for the next president. The hawks complain of Iranian meddling in Iraq (failing to note that Tehran seems to have better relations with Baghdad than does any Arab state). Former UN ambassador John Bolton is calling for air strikes against Iranian “training camps.” Yet the consensus remains that a chastened administration understands that expanding the war would have terrible consequences.

But sometimes bad things aren’t planned. The U.S. Navy has a huge presence in the Persian Gulf, and in the last few years there have been several tense standoffs between American ships and Iranian patrols. Could a game of chicken between a few Iranian boats and a U.S. destroyer start a war that would benefit neither party? According to a report by IPS editor Jim Lobe, concern over this scenario is one reason CENTCOM commander William Fallon was pushing for an “incidents at sea” agreement with Tehran before he was removed from his post.

Who would want such a war? And could a third party—under a false flag—try to ignite it? While Israel has dabbled

in such actions in the past (see the Lavon Affair), a far more likely culprit is al-Qaeda, which has ramped up its rhetoric against the “apostate” regime of the Persians, openly cheered the prospect of a U.S. nuclear attack on Iran, and would like nothing better than an all-out conflict between its two main enemies.

Perhaps, in the interest of clarity, the Beltway’s Iran hawks should begin wearing Osama bin Laden buttons beside their American flag lapel pins.

[EUROPE]

CAPITAL FELLOW

In Italy this month, Romans greeted their new far-right mayor with fascist salutes and cries of “Duce, Duce.” In London, meanwhile, Conservatives exalted in the election of a less intimidating figure, Alexander Boris de Pfeffel Johnson, aka Boris.

Last year, when Johnson, a former editor of the London *Spectator*, announced his candidacy, he was widely—and stupidly—dismissed as a joke. He was called idiot, clown, racist, snob, homophobe, bungler, boob. But Londoners still liked him, and Johnson confounded critics by defeating the wily socialist incumbent, Ken Livingstone. His victory gives the British Conservative Party their first position of significant power since 1997.

Johnson, who was born in New York, is certainly not a fool. He is a Tory hedonist, a Thatcherite libertarian, a man with considerable brains and ambition, perhaps the most brilliant journalist of his generation. He is also a genuine conservative, if conservatism is understood as a mood rather than a creed. Like many of the Right’s best, he deals in self-deprecation. “Beneath the carefully constructed veneer of a blithering buffoon,” he once said of himself, “there lurks a blithering buffoon.”

Although he initially supported the Iraq War, Johnson soon changed his

mind. Under his editorship, the *Spectator* became sharply critical of Bush, Tony Blair, and the neoconservative project.

Here’s hoping the mayor will make himself heard on both sides of the Atlantic.

[CULTURE]

ESCORTED AWAY

Few believed that Deborah Jean Palfrey didn’t know her high-priced “escorts” were selling sex to famous Washingtonians. A jury certainly didn’t, convicting her on April 15 of money laundering and racketeering. In July, she would have been sentenced to as many as 55 years in prison, though she would have served far fewer.

The madam chose the death penalty instead. Her mother found her hanging. A note read, “I cannot live the next 6-8 years behind bars ... only to come out of prison in my late 50’s a broken, penniless, and very much alone woman.” It’s a poignant confession: high glamour and hot nights paid no lasting dividend; her brand of intimacy provided no comfort. Even before Palfrey was busted by her government, she was broken by her trade.

Meanwhile, the men in smart suits got on with their lives—to the next Crystal or Amber or Tiffany. Most remained anonymous. The biggest name to slip out of Palfrey’s black book, Sen. David Vitter, still enjoys the privileges of his office. Even Eliot Spitzer, also caught in a recent prostitution scandal, was forced out for hypocrisy as much as vice. Unlike the madam, he suffered no legal ramifications.

Prostitution rightly remains illegal. Whiny arguments about “consenting adults” can’t overcome the social costs of commercializing sex. The burdens would still weigh disproportionately on women. But neither does the current system work, since fixating on banking crimes seems to catch the wrong culprits. ■

The American Conservative

Publisher

Ron Unz

Editor

Scott McConnell

Executive Editor

Kara Hopkins

Associate Editors

Michael Brendan Dougherty

Daniel McCarthy

Literary Editor

Freddy Gray

Film Critic

Steve Sailer

Contributing Editors

W. James Antle III, Andrew J. Bacevich, Doug Bandow, James Bovard, Michael C. Besch, Philip Giraldi, Paul Gottfried, Leon Hadar, Peter Hitchens, Daniel Larison, Christopher Layne, Eric S. Margolis, Tom Piatak, James P. Pinkerton, Justin Raimondo, Fred Reed, R.J. Stove, Thomas E. Woods Jr.

Art Director

Mark Graef

Associate Publisher

Jon Basil Utley

Publishing Consultant

Ronald E. Burr

Office Manager

Róisín Smyth

Founding Editors

Patrick J. Buchanan, Taki Theodoracopulos

The American Conservative, Vol. 7, No. 10, May 19, 2008 (ISSN 1540-966X). Reg. U.S. Pat. & Tm. Off. TAC is published 24 times per year, biweekly (except for January and August) for \$49.97 per year by The American Conservative, LLC, 1300 Wilson Blvd., Suite 120, Arlington, VA, 22209. Periodicals postage paid at Arlington, VA, and additional mailing offices. Printed in the United States of America. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *The American Conservative*, P.O. Box 9030, Maple Shade, NJ 08052-9030.

Subscription rates: \$49.97 per year (24 issues) in the U.S., \$54.97 in Canada (U.S. funds), and \$89.97 other foreign, via airmail. Back issues: \$6.00 (prepaid) per copy in USA, \$7.00 in Canada (U.S. funds).

For subscription orders, payments, and other subscription inquiries—

By phone: **800-579-6148**

(outside the U.S./Canada 856-380-4131)

Via Web: www.amconmag.com

By mail: *The American Conservative*, P.O. Box 9030, Maple Shade, NJ 08052-9030

When ordering a subscription please allow 4-6 weeks for delivery of your first issue.

Inquiries and letters to the editor should be sent to letters@amconmag.com. For advertising sales or editorial call 703-875-7600.

This issue went to press on May 8, 2008.

Copyright 2008 *The American Conservative*.

[a red star is born]

The Next Fidel

Venezuela's Hugo Chavez bids to revive revolutionary Marxism.

By Peter Hitchens

VIEWED FROM THE SHANTY TOWNS that peer down on it from the surrounding hillsides, Caracas looks like a caricature Latin American capital, with too much North American influence of the wrong kind and too little of the right kind. Here, spoiling a lovely steep valley, is the usual sad, globalized panorama of ugly, uninteresting concrete towers, one of them absurdly crowned with a huge Pepsi can. You might as well decorate the skyline with a gigantic banana.

And here is the usual trite contrast, long common in the Third World and rapidly spreading to the First World—gross wealth on display next to rancid squalor. Yes, there really are hovels a few hundred feet from a freeway crammed with new SUV's. How obvious. How stupid.

This is, at first sight, a place of clichés. Here they all are—the plethora of uniforms, the propaganda murals, the military despot, the rigged elections, the frequent, sometimes farcical putsches, the blithe, unashamed corruption and the prevalent crime, the Cuban fraternal assistance, the blatant suppression of opponents, the currency restrictions, the annoying, avoidable shortages of milk and toilet paper, the unvarying signs of a socialist hand on the economic tiller.

And like so many authoritarian states, Venezuela has little basic order or justice. There are a thousand murders a month in a country of 28 million people. The police simply pull out of the slums on weekends, unable to face the power of the gangs.

Only when you look a little more closely do you find, hidden in corners or quietly understated, evidence of a serious civil society and a genuine national independence—a glorious equestrian statue of Simon Bolivar, a ravishing old cathedral, an elegant, airy 19th-century parliament house embodying the heart-breaking over-optimism of the country's founders, and many honest people, equipped to live in liberty and disturbed by the menace of dictatorship.

They are right to be disturbed. It is astonishing, after more than a century of similar follies all over the world, all ending in weeping or worse, how anyone can still be taken in by the flatulent promises of political messiahs or how anyone cannot be repelled by the blatant unfairness, the transparent purchasing of the votes of the poor, the sheer vanity of Hugo Chavez.

And yet here we go again. No sooner has Fidel Castro finally accepted that his long career in radical chic showbusiness is over and retired to his bed than this new Marxoid messiah, with his own interminable speeches and dubious foreign alliances, has arisen in the Caribbean, loathed to the point of rage by the White House and absurdly idolized by the fashionable Left of the whole world.

I suppose one explanation for this resurrection must be the extraordinarily rapid collapse of the brief, intense Thatcher-Reagan dream. They told us that the world would finally accept that

the market was all and that the implosion of the USSR would discredit world-reforming socialism for good. No such luck. The market philosophy, lacking any real interest in the human soul, turned out not to be very persuasive even in its countries of origin and to be a gross, bloated failure when tried in the former Evil Empire itself. If it didn't kill off idealist yearnings in Washington, London, or Brussels—let alone in Kabul and Mecca—why should it do so here, where some of the Caracas slum quarters have been suppurating on their neglected slopes for seven decades?

Then, of course, there is the Bush-Cheney effect. Nothing could have more effectively revived bad old resentful anti-Americanism—the cartoon kind that relies on images of a heedless, greedy, violent Uncle Sam—than Messrs. Bush and Cheney. They did exactly what people like Hugo Chavez always say they do. They mistook force for power.

It is also hard to dislike Comrade Chavez personally, mainly because he is funny—funny about himself, funny about others, funny at the expense of opponents, who mostly deserve to be laughed at. He calls President Bush “Mr. Danger,” which isn't a bad name for him.

But he just will not stop talking. All too frequently Chavez commandeers the terrestrial TV channels—the poor can afford no others—and harangues his people, urging them to be ever more

grateful for the undoubted benisons he has rained upon them: smart new apartment blocks and shiny new schools can be seen among the slums, and Cuban doctors provide unheard of medical care to the poor. The price is paid in a slow, systematic accretion of absolute power and in obligatory harangues.

When Spain's King Juan Carlos recently snapped "Why don't you shut up?" at Chavez at a Spanish-American summit, thousands of Venezuelans downloaded the royal outburst for use as a ring-tone on their cellphones. Chavez is undeterred by such mockery. He says his weekly TV show "Hallo, President!" is a religious program "because only God knows when it will end." This is disagreeably true for the worthies who have to sit in the invited audience, shifting from buttock to buttock as the hours amble by, sustaining themselves with sandwiches and gulps from water bottles.

It is autocracy conducted as a sort of "Oprah Winfrey Show," with jokes, reminiscence, and singing thrown in. And despite Chavez's charm and self-mockery, it is very, very serious. Remember, this is a man who first sought supreme office in a bungled military coup in 1992. We can laugh at it now because it failed, comically, but there is something terrifying about a man who thinks so highly of himself that he tries to take state power with violence. Castro's first putsch, the Moncada Barracks affair, was likewise a pantomime of bungles. Both failed only because their leaders hadn't at that stage had enough practice in taking over governments.

It was then, just after his failure had become obvious, that Chavez first used the menacing phrase that is now linked with him forever. The authorities, astonishingly, allowed the unsuccessful putschist to go on national TV, supposedly to tell his troops to surrender. This he duly did, but at the end he carefully added the words "por ahora"—"for now."

After a little while in prison, Chavez decided to take the democratic route, cleverly exploiting the uselessness and division of his opponents, and returned as promised. Since then, by what his enemies describe as rigging and corruption, he has remained in office, surviving a coup and slowly strengthening his control of the machinery of patronage and propaganda.

Now those two potent words, "por ahora," in white letters on a red background, appear again all over Caracas on the most prominent billboards. Their new meaning, known to everyone, is full of menace to those who have dared oppose Chavez. They refer to the referendum last December, which Chavez narrowly lost. Had he won, he would have become far more powerful, far more of a threat to private property, far harder to dislodge. There would have been no limit on his tenure of office, due to end in 2013. Many believe he wanted to ignore the result—he is widely accused of constant, highly scientific ballot-rigging of the kind that is very hard to prove—and was only dissuaded from doing so by a phone call from his friend Fidel Castro.

Whatever the reason, Chavez conceded defeat with a rather touching grace, then told his supporters to go home and let the opposition celebrate. But only for now. He can afford to be restrained. Time and the ever rising price of oil allow him to wait till later to try again. In the meantime, he continues to hustle his country down the familiar Stalinist staircase that leads to one-party rule, censorship, indoctrination, and prison camps, but this time so slowly that it will never again be alarming enough, at any particular moment, to frighten his opponents into effective action.

If there were any justice, Chavez would long ago have been forced from office by bankruptcy. His economic management is wasteful and sloppy and involves a great deal of expensive largesse to the

poor in return for their votes, as well as disastrous controls that create shortages. The national oil company—which Chavez treats as his private bank—badly needs costly investment to secure future supplies. But because the Chinese and Indian booms and the Iraq War have taken the demand for oil to unseen heights, he need not worry about this. The money still comes in as fast as he can spend it. Meanwhile, much of the middle classes can be bought off with gasoline so cheap that you can fill a tank for \$1.50.

Chavez lost the vote largely because of two very different opponents—one a general, the other a collection of politically untried students.

Gen. Raul Isaias Baduel had been a comrade of Chavez's from their early days in the army. Rather than support Chavez's autocratic constitutional reforms, he resigned as defense minister. This was accepted with a smile. But within a few weeks, General Baduel found himself being denounced by government hacks as a traitor—any former sympathizer who dares criticize gets this treatment—and having his bodyguards withdrawn.

Baduel, a religious man whose desk is covered with symbols of several faiths, also experienced a side of Chavez that his radical supporters in America and Europe find hard to explain or defend—a faint but unmistakable whiff of Judeophobia. He was accused of being "too close" to Venezuela's small Jewish community.

His defection was an especially hard blow because he had helped save Chavez from an attempted coup by conservative opponents in 2002. Last December, only five years later, he charged his old friend with plotting what was in effect a coup against the constitution. He says that on both occasions he was acting according to the same principle:

In 2002, as a soldier, I defended the laws and constitution against an attempted coup. Last December, as

a citizen and a civilian I felt I also had to defend the laws and the constitution. Friendship does not mean you have to mortgage your principles. Loyalty is not complicity. I was taught as a child that friendship is a fundamental value—but when you place friendship and principle in the balance, principle weighs more heavily.

Such opposition, if only it were linked to a serious political party, would be dangerous to Chavez. As yet, there are few signs that Baduel has any wider political skills. He was able to slow down his old comrade's progress. But to remove and replace him with a real political party, able to appeal to the poor and offer reform and preserve liberty, is far more difficult.

The students, whom Chavez tried to dismiss as the spoiled children of the rich, are potentially a greater threat to him. They had no idea how much power they possessed when they began demonstrating against Chavez's vindictive closure of the country's oldest TV station, RCTV. This was pure, crude spite, vengeance for that station daring to criticize him. Unlike the traditional conservative political parties, discredited by years of corruption, neglect, and incompetence, the students could not be dismissed as self-serving or as enemies of the Venezuelan poor.

One of their leaders was Geraldine Alvarez, just 22. She and her friends, alarmed for freedom of speech when Chavez announced his plan to close RCTV, organized a genuinely independent protest. They were amazed when they suddenly found themselves both popular and under attack from the Chavez state. The official TV censored an interview with them. The police, not bothering to pretend to be impartial, made violent attacks on their peaceful marches. They were slandered and

smeared by the president's many mouthpieces. Geraldine recalls:

When we went to the National Assembly and asked for the right of reply, they said we were terrorists and trained by the CIA. They smeared us personally. They said on state TV that I was mentally ill and on medication—my parents had to watch that.

But most people did not buy these lies. Poor people in this country view students with sympathy. They could see that the placards we carried on our marches were home-made, not mass-produced like those of the government.

Nor did they believe it when Chavez said that the students were "spoiled rich brats," since most of them came from modest middle-class or working-class homes. So when ordinary censorship and routine smears failed, the regime resorted to the methods used by Stalin's agents in the nations of Eastern Europe 60 years ago.

Mysterious counter-demonstrators materialized on the streets, pelting the students with bottles and stones from behind police lines. Chavez enthusiasts were unleashed on the campus of the capital's main private university firing handguns. They arrived on motorbikes and in buses with official license plates. The state did not try very hard to hide its complicity. Interior Minister Pedro Carreno went on TV dressed in a revolutionary red T-shirt to blame the university and the students for being attacked.

But the students, innocent as they may have been of traditional political ambition, were wise as serpents. They resisted the strong temptation to attack the president personally. They ignored attempts by the official opposition leaders to co-opt them. They remained, to the end, untainted by conventional poli-

tics, which until recently was a dreary system in which two more-or-less identical parties alternated in office while corruption flourished. Because they stayed clean, their battle gave confidence to those who had given up hope of halting Chavez and undoubtedly helped the campaign for a "no" vote a few months later. But their purity also limited their ability to do more than oppose. Like General Baduel, they could apply the brakes, but they had no power to offer a program of their own.

Revenge is already being prepared. Chavez is now demanding that the universities drop their entrance examinations so that he can pack them with young half-educated supporters who can elbow aside Geraldine and her liberty-loving friends. He is already funding other universities, well equipped with fleets of buses to ferry their students to "spontaneous rallies" so that what happened last autumn can never be repeated.

Venezuela ought to be an advanced and free country under the rule of law. It has plenty of educated, articulate people. It has wealth. It has most of the constituents of a serious civil society, including strong public opinion. It was born out of a revolt against autocracy.

It is a measure of the failure of free countries to encourage others to adopt their best characteristics that such a place should be faced with a choice between neglect, plutocracy, and corruption on the one hand and crude revolutionary Marxism on the other. Much the same could be said of many of the new "democracies" that sprang up in the territories once ruled by Communists.

The real essence of civilization, freedom under the law, seems much harder to export than the cheaper, flashier commodity we like to call "democracy." ■

Peter Hitchens is a columnist for the London Mail on Sunday and blogs at <http://hitchensblog.mailonsunday.co.uk>.

When the Left Was Right

The radicals of the '60s had another side: decentralist, anti-interventionist, and almost Kirkian.

By Bill Kauffman

THE GHOSTS OF 1968 are haunting Barack Obama, which is tremendously unfair, I say as his coeval, given that our cohort spent the Chicago Democratic Convention sticking baseball cards in our bicycle spokes rather than pelting Mayor Daley's finest with porcine epithets. But guilt by association is ironclad in these days when American political discourse is controlled by hall monitors and tattletales. Obama's friendship—acquaintance?—with Bill Ayers and Bernardine Dohrn is about to get extended play as the Republicans contrast Obama's Weatherfriends with their nominee's stint in the Hanoi Hilton.

By his own account, John McCain lived in North Vietnamese captivity longer than anywhere else in his itinerant life. This deracination and the resultant military-brat pathologies on display in McCain will go unexploited by the Democrats, whose nominee-in-waiting and maid-of-dishonor are just as placeless as Carpetbag John. And besides, the entire political class of Washington has all the indigenous flavor of the Crystal City Metro station. It would never occur to an attack-ad maker that there was anything wrong with rootlessness.

If Obama bears the standard, the revolutionary posturing of Bill ("kill your parents") Ayers and Bernardine ("bring the war home") Dohrn will serve as the synecdoche of '68 in Republican minds. Prepare for another aphasiac episode in what Gore Vidal calls the United States of Amnesia. But I say to hell with Ayers and Dohrn. Let us remember the other

New Left—a humane, decentralist, thoroughly American New Left that regarded socialism as "a way to bury social problems under a federal bureaucracy," in the words of Carl Oglesby, president of Students for a Democratic Society in 1965-66 and a key figure in its Middle American wing, which extended from independent anti-imperialist liberals to trans-Mississippi "Prairie Power" radicals. ("Texas anarchists," sneered the elite East Coast-schooled red-diaper babies at the hell-raising directional state college Prairie Power kids.)

As Old Right historian Leonard Liggio wrote in 1970, "Since there was little official SDS ideology, and what there was was populist and libertarian, it was attractive to the large numbers of American students who were growing conscious of their opposition to the educational factory system, the bureaucracy, the draft and the war." This libertarian Middle American tendency faded as humorless Marxists and violent fanatics à la Ayers and Dohrn blew SDS apart. But even as it decomposed, the New Left was an olio of old-fashioned American rebellion, a naïve idealization of Third World revolutionaries and the bomb-happy Marxism of groups such as Weatherman. The sager figures in the New Left, however, rejected television, IBM, nomadic corporate culture, and the Cold War—all profoundly anti-conservative forces—and I wonder just what is so "Left" about that?

The Port Huron Statement, the 1962 manifesto of SDS, was drawn up in large

part by the Michigan Catholic baseball fan Tom Hayden. The statement is a mixed bag: denunciations of racial bigotry, bureaucracy, and the militarization of American life bump into simultaneous calls for national healthcare and an expanded welfare state. Yet the Port Huron Statement, and SDS, emphasized the core principle of decentralization, of breaking overly large institutions and even cities down to a more human scale, "based on the vision of man as master of his machines and his society."

"We oppose the depersonalization that reduces human beings to the status of things," declared the authors. The line might have been written by another Michigan lad, Russell Kirk of Mecosta. Kirk was no New Leftist, though he did later befriend—and in 1976 voted for—Eugene McCarthy, the peace candidate of the 1968 Democratic primaries, the distributist-inclined Catholic intellectual who befuddled his conventional liberal supporters with talk of a salutary "depersonalizing" of the presidency, of reducing that office to its constitutional dimensions, shorn of the accreted cult of personality.

Left and Right mostly hurled anathemas at each other in 1968, but not always, and the rare friendly exchanges over the phantom barriers were rich with promise—a promise fulfilled, in a way, one year later, in the 1969 New York City mayoralty campaign of Norman Mailer, who campaigned as a "left conservative" on a platform of power to the neighborhoods.

But SDS president Carl Oglesby was the New Left figure who first saw the potential of a Left-Right linkage.

Oglesby was the son of rural working-class Southerners who had joined the diaspora North, where his father worked in an Akron rubber factory. Said dad to his radical son: "Damn it, you ought to get yourself a real job where you can settle down and take care of your family and quit all this unpatriotic horses--t." Carl did not follow his father's advice, but just hearing it mattered.

Oglesby was a playwright—he had written a well-received work on the Hatfield-McCoy feud—toiling within the military-industrial complex at Bendix Aerospace Systems when, fresh off the composition of an anti-Vietnam War position paper, he was elected president of SDS in June 1965. He was, at once, both more radical and more conservative than Hayden and the organization's leftist activists. As he writes in his recent memoir, *Ravens in the Storm*, "I

was introduced to the writings of Murray Rothbard, the antimilitarist libertarian economist whose long and winding yet somehow consistent road had taken him from anti-New Deal isolationist Robert Taft supporter into friendship with the quasi-pacifist Nebraska Republican Congressman Howard Buffett (father of a much less interesting man) then over to the League of (Adlai) Stevensonian Democrats and, by 1968, into tentative comradeship with the anarchist factions of the New Left. While other young radicals read Marcuse or Fanon, Carl Oglesby dug Murray Rothbard.

In his essay "Vietnamese Crucible," published in the 1967 volume *Containment and Change*, Oglesby rejected the "socialist radical, the corporatist conservative, and the welfare-state liberal" and challenged the New Left to embrace "American democratic populism" and "the American libertarian right."

OGLESBY REJECTED THE "SOCIALIST RADICAL, THE CORPORATIST CONSERVATIVE, AND THE WELFARE-STATE LIBERAL" AND CHALLENGED THE NEW LEFT TO EMBRACE "AMERICAN DEMOCRATIC POPULISM" AND "THE AMERICAN LIBERTARIAN RIGHT."

believed that America's 'small-r' republicans would also have to get engaged if the antiwar cause were to have the least chance of succeeding."

Taking up his predecessor Paul Potter's challenge to "name the system," Oglesby made his own name with a November 1965 speech in Washington in which he fingered "corporate liberalism" as the "system that creates and sustains the war in Vietnam." He named names: not Goldwater or Kirk but Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Bundy, McNamara, Rusk, Lodge, and Goldberg.

Through Professor Richard Schaul of Princeton Theological Seminary, Oglesby

Invoking Senator Taft, Gen. Douglas MacArthur, Congressman Buffett, and *Saturday Evening Post* writer Garet Garrett, among other stalwarts of the Old Right, he asked, "Why have the traditional opponents of big, militarized, central authoritarian government now joined forces with such a government's boldest advocates?" What in the name of Thomas Jefferson were conservatives doing holding the bag for Robert Strange McNamara?

After explicating the Old Right to a readership that must have been, at the least, nonplussed, Oglesby connected the dots:

This style of political thought, rootedly American, is carried forward today by the Negro freedom movement and the student movement against Great Society-Free World imperialism. That these movements are called leftist means nothing. They are of the grain of American humanist individualism and voluntaristic associational action; and it is only through them that the libertarian tradition is activated and kept alive. In a strong sense, the Old Right and the New Left are morally and politically coordinate.

Oglesby did not predict an alliance; he merely pointed out the kinship of dissenters. Whether the twain would ever meet was another matter. (They might have met, come to think of it, via Mark Twain, in the character of anti-imperialist Tom Sawyer.)

"The New Left," warned Oglesby, "can lose itself in the imported left-wing debates of the thirties, wondering what it ought to say about technocracy and Stalin." (It did lose itself, though Uncle Joe was not the cause—more like Leninism and an unmooring from those American roots.) "The libertarian right," Oglesby continued, "can remain hypnotically charmed by the authoritarian imperialists whose only ultimate love is Power, the subhuman brownshirted power of the jingo state militant, the state rampant, the iron state possessed of its own clanking glory." Well, yes, that and the need to kiss the rings of foundation presidents who doled out the money on which the organized Right became just as dependent as any puling mendicant from the National Welfare Rights Organization. (Among those captivated by this essay was a former Goldwater Girl named Hillary Rodham, who became friendly, for a while, with Oglesby. Alas, she entered her own crucible and came out mistress of the iron-maiden state.)

The Marxists and conventional leftists within SDS had no idea what to make of this stirring call for a prison break from the Left-Right Bastille. Consider Bernardine Dohrn, the bloodlust-ing ex-cheerleader and pinup girl of Weatherman. Dohrn, a self-declared “revolutionary communist,” was perplexed by Oglesby’s fondness for right-wing isolationists.

“I’m not sure I know where you’re coming from,” Dohrn said to Oglesby, as he recounts in *Ravens in the Storm*.

FOR ALL THEIR SURFACE DIFFERENCES AND ROTE HOSTILITY, THE HIPPIES AND REDNECKS WERE ON THE SAME SIDE: THAT OF LOCALLY BASED COMMUNITY.

Oglesby’s reply was simple, brilliant, and no doubt baffling to Dohrn: “Ann Arbor, Kent, Akron, Kalamazoo.”

For Oglesby understood, as that landmark druggy paean to youth culture and the pioneer virtues “Easy Rider” had it, that for all their surface differences and rote hostility, the hippies and rednecks, the small farmers and shaggy communards, were on the same side: that of liberty, of locally based community, of independence from the war machine. Billy Joe Smythe, LeRoy Washington, and Luis Chavez were as one to McGeorge Bundy: interchangeable body-bag fillers. Hello, Big Muddy; Hello, Fodder ...

Oglesby was in ’68, and remains today, an admirer of Bobby Kennedy as the only pol who might have gathered the dispossessed in a hopeful democratic movement. Scoff if you will—he’s used to it. After all, Oglesby once tried to convince Dohrn that an SDS-organized volunteer band of sugarcane cutters defying the travel ban to Cuba should include such “good, old-fashioned regular Americans” as PTA members and “Rotarians and Elks.”

“Carl, you’re getting a bit wild-eyed,” replied the woman who responded to

news of the Manson family’s murder of the LaBiancas by ejaculating, “Dig it. First they killed those pigs, then they ate dinner in the same room as them. Then they even shoved a fork into a victim’s stomach. Wild!” The only good Elk, it seems, is a dead Elk.

Oglesby was drummed out of SDS in a 1969 star-chamber trial. A harridan named Arlene Eisen Bergman arraigned him for being “trapped in our early, bourgeois stage” and for not progressing into “a Marxist-Leninist perspective.”

Oglesby’s sins, as enumerated by Bergman, included “that bizarre last chapter in your book ... where you actually propose an alliance with what you call, let’s see, ‘principled conservatives.’”

“SDS is not trying to reach the readers of *Life* magazine,” Dohrn shouted at Oglesby. Carl was expelled; he went on to record two fine albums of folk-Beat Americana, and one supposes that his vision came closest to being realized in the music of Bob Dylan, the Minnesota-bred Goldwater-admiring scourge of the masters of war who wrote in the liner notes to his 1993 album “World Gone Wrong,” “give me a thousand acres of tractable land & all the gang members that exist & you’ll see the Authentic alternative lifestyle, the Agrarian one.”

What Oglesby called the “freewheeling participatory democracy” of SDS was dynamited by the likes of Ayers and Dohrn, representatives of the very worst of the anti-American Left, who have settled into their sixties in comfortable prosperity while Carl Oglesby, lacking inherited wealth, battles illness as best he can. Life ain’t fair. The cheerleaders and the rich boys always win, don’t they?

Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver asked Oglesby to run as his vice-presidential candidate on the 1968 Peace and Freedom Party ticket. Carl, in a hiccup of realpolitik, said no. But there had been common concerns. Cleaver had sharply assayed the demise of federalism:

There aren’t any more state governments. We have these honorary pigs like Mayor Alioto ... presiding over the distribution of a lot of federal funds. He’s plugged into one gigantic system, one octopus spanning the continent from one end to the other, reaching its tentacles all around the world, in everybody’s pocket and around everybody’s neck. We have just one octopus. A beast with his head wherever LBJ might be tonight.

Yes, the Panthers were thugs, the least imaginative of them had been infected with the Marxist-Leninist virus, and Cleaver committed some horrendous crimes. But the Panthers, unlike John McCain, came from neighborhoods, and the best of them were groping toward a Marcus Garvey-Malcolm X philosophy of community self-reliance. You’ve also got to admit that they were solid on Second Amendment issues. (Lynn Scarlett and I interviewed Cleaver for *Reason* in 1985. His place was easy to find: it was the only front porch in his Berkeley neighborhood flying an American flag.)

Okay, so maybe Eldridge isn’t your cup of hallucinatory nutmeg tea. What about the only other 1968 general election presidential candidate worth a look: Gov. George Wallace of the right-wing American Independent Party?

If you can get beyond Wallace’s reprehensible race-baiting, which soon gave way to active courtship of black voters, certain of his policies overlapped with the humane Left. He proposed decentralizing industries because “I don’t

think God meant people to be all jammed up in cities. No courtesy, no time, no room—that's all you get in cities." He called for removing the tax exemption from foundations and emitted a class-war cry—"the rednecks are coming"—that frightened the hell out of *New York Times* readers and William F. Buckley Jr., who called him a "country and western Marxist." Read Wallace and tell me if this isn't also the spirit of the New Left:

The biggest domestic issue for 1968? I'll tell you. It's people—our fine American people, living their own lives, buying their own homes, educating their children, running their own farms, working the way they like to work, and not having the bureaucrats and intellectual morons trying to manage everything for them. It's a matter of trusting the people to make their own decisions.

One of the few journalists who heard Wallace in '68 was Pete Hamill, who wrote in the New Left monthly *Ramparts* that "Wallace and the black and radical militants ... share some common ground: local control of schools and institutions, a desire to radically change America, a violent distrust of the power structure and the establishment. In this year's election, the only one of the three major candidates who is a true radical is Wallace."

George Wallace and the New Left despised each other: "fascist" and "dirty beatniks" were about as sophisticated as the badinage got. Only a hopeless romantic—and what other kind is there?—would ponder the cross-pollinating possibilities: Creedence Clearwater Revival playing "Fortunate Son" at Wallace rallies or the Guvnah's supporters—Chill Wills, Walter Brennan, George "Goober" Lindsay—joining Phil Ochs in the chorus of "I Ain't Marching

Anymore" at a rally outside the Opelika draft board.

Sigh. Maybe the closest we got to this sort of hybrid was the flat-out racist Asa Carter, who penned Wallace's disgraceful 1962 "segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever" inaugural address and later wrote, under the name Forrest Carter, the novel *Gone To Texas*, which became the Clint Eastwood masterpiece "The Outlaw Josey Wales."

Compared to Humphrey and Nixon, George Wallace was the peacenik in the '68 race. (Apologies to the aborted Cleaver-Oglesby ticket.) If the Vietnam War was not winnable within 90 days of his taking office, Wallace pledged an immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops. As his aides told Pete Hamill about Vietnam, "The hell with it."

Wallace also called foreign-aid money "poured down a rat hole" and demanded that European and Asian allies pay more for their defense. The relative prudence of the Alabama governor's foreign policy was obscured by his disastrous selection of Gen. Curtis "bomb them back into the Stone Age" LeMay as his running mate. LeMay thought himself a "moderate Republican," which may have been true: the most hawkish figure in American politics in 1968, after all, was that moderate Republican and Picasso-collecting war-mongering New York governor, Nelson Rockefeller. (Oh, what might have been: before LeMay, Wallace reportedly had asked Colonel Sanders, Mr. Kentucky Fried Chicken, to join the ticket. Extra crispy chicken or extra crispy Vietnamese children: therein lies the Sanders-LeMay difference.)

Maybe "the Devil's got a Wallace sticker on the back of his car," as the Drive-By Truckers sing, but ol' George sure had trust-fund Weatherboy Billy Ayers's number: "It's the damn rich who turn Communist. You ever see a poor Communist?"

Wallace traditionally ran strong primary campaigns in Wisconsin, stronghold of Upper Midwest populism, but as he was running in '68, the state was losing one of its great patriots, William Appleman Williams, the favorite historian of the Middle American New Left. Williams was from Atlantic, Iowa—legend has it, says Paul Buhle, coauthor of an excellent biography of Williams, that the highway sign welcoming visitors to Atlantic bore "the Jeffersonian motto 'The Government Which Governs Least, Governs Best.'" Bill Williams, who left Atlantic for the U.S. Naval Academy (and remained proud of the fact) and later rehabilitated those defenderless conservative presidents John Quincy Adams and Herbert Hoover, fit perfectly within the American populist tradition of the University of Wisconsin. But in 1968, Williams left Madison for Oregon State to, in Buhle's words, "teach undergraduates, live by the ocean, and live in a diversified community of 'ordinary' Americans."

As he moved off-center, taking his stand in the hinterlands, Williams called for a return to the Articles of Confederation and a radical decentralization of political and economic power—a decentralist socialism that probably looked better in co-operative theory than it would have in barbed-regulation practice. He decried the American Empire as unworthy of us; he, too, was of the Left yet speaking to the Right, trying to find that little egalitarian village where the shopkeeper and the jazz musician and the carpenter might live in liberty and fraternity.

I recently asked Williams's biographer Buhle, a Madison SDSer, publisher of the New Left journal *Radical America*, and editor of the recent *Students for a Democratic Society: A Graphic History*, about the prospects for cashing in on the missed chances of 1968. "The spirit at large in the U.S. now reminds

me more of the later 1960s New Left/Old Right dialogue or encounter than anything since then," he says. "Consequently, I find myself more in dialogue with old-fashioned conservatives than I have been, and I suspect that this is widely true."

The Bush wars have brought together anti-imperialists of Left and Right, but their coalescence is being forged not so much overseas as in our backyards. A "wonderful example," says Buhle, "is conservation, small-town life, and the bird population. All kinds of conservatives and small-town Republicans find themselves fending off new demands for exploitation of public resources (threats to water supplies and such)." Farmers markets are another meeting ground, he notes, as the organic and Eat Local and community-supported agriculture movements introduce folks who look homeward rather than into Baghdad suns. Left? Right? What difference does it make? The model organic farm in my neck of the woods, a truly inspiring extended-family venture, was begun by a former college hockey player and active member of the New York State Conservative Party. I know greens, right-to-lifers, NRA members, and just plain apolitical farmers who are relocating life, brightening their little corner of the world in their daily acts.

The imperialists, the depersonalizers, the warmakers—a Biblical 40 years have passed since 1968, and they are with us still. But look around and you'll see that the seeds planted by the New Left have not all fallen on hard ground. I think maybe they're ready to flower. ■

Bill Kauffman's Ain't My America: The Long, Noble History of Antiwar Conservatism and Middle American Anti-Imperialism has just been published by Henry Holt/Metropolitan.

Some officers at the Central Intelligence Agency are beginning to wonder if Director Michael Hayden has had a Saul on the road to Damascus experience, possibly smitten by the voice of Dick Cheney while traversing the streets of McLean in his armored limousine. Hayden has impressed staff with his willingness to take a hard line with the White House when his analysts have drawn conclusions that do not reflect official policy, as when he supported the controversial National Intelligence Estimate on Iran that was prepared in 2007. But lately he appears to have become much more accommodating. At the end of April, he stated, "It is my opinion, it is the policy of the Iranian government, approved to highest level of that government, to facilitate the killing of Americans in Iraq. Just make sure there's clarity on that." Analysts who have examined the evidence for the Iranian government's direct involvement in killing Americans wonder what exactly Hayden might be referring to. Iranian policy is hardly likely to be benign toward the huge U.S. military presence next door and in the Persian Gulf, but the mullahs have been both pragmatic and cautious in their responses and have generally proved unwilling to provoke retaliation by Washington. Hayden's statement refers to his "opinion," a word that does not sit well with intelligence analysts, who generally prefer to determine whether a proposition is supported by available facts. The director's conclusion that he is providing "clarity" is also disputed. One CIA wag suggested that Hayden is really only expressing clarity about his opinion.



Intelligence experts are also wondering about Hayden's statement that Syria was close to having the capability to produce one or two nuclear weapons per year prior to the Israeli bombing of a suspected reactor

last September. There is no evidence to suggest that the Syrians were anywhere close to having such a capability, even if the destroyed building was a nuclear facility, which is by no means certain. Intelligence on the reactor itself came largely from the Israelis and consisted of a video and photos allegedly shot in and around the building, as well as related reports on North Korean activity. The White House has had the information since last summer, but it was tightly held, and very few analysts at CIA or elsewhere in the intelligence community were allowed to review it. Several who saw the evidence were not convinced, asking how the photos were obtained and suspecting that they had been faked. The building's configuration did not necessarily indicate a reactor, and analysts immediately noted that it was lacking anti-aircraft defenses, a protective perimeter, a reprocessing plant to produce a weapon, an adequate power supply, and sufficient water for cooling. There is also no evidence that Syria has any uranium stockpile. Hayden eventually found a couple of senior analysts who were willing to participate in the dog-and-pony show for Congress, but many in the intelligence community remain unconvinced that the Syrian building was a reactor.

Philip Giraldi, a former CIA Officer, is a fellow at the American Conservative Defense Alliance.

The Wright Answer

The speech Obama should deliver—but won't.

By Steve Sailer

HOW DID AS SMOOTH an operator as Barack Obama so mishandle the roadblock he must have known stood between him and the White House: his intimate two-decade-long relationship with his far leftist minister, the erudite and articulate Rev. Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright Jr.? And what, if anything, can he do to repair the damage?

As I asked more than a year ago, "Why has Obama tied his fate to the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, a tactless race man who is the living opposite of the myth Obama is trying to project about himself?"

Obama's candidacy is based on encouraging white voters to assume naïvely that his mixed-race ancestry means he is genetically programmed for racial and political moderation. Indeed, in his long-postponed denunciation of Wright on April 29, the reeling Obama made explicit the amusingly eugenic thinking implicit in Obamamania:

That's in my DNA, trying to promote mutual understanding to insist that we all share common hopes and common dreams as Americans and as human beings.

This kind of fantasizing about Obama was embarrassingly widespread before television finally began paying attention to Wright in March. For example, back on Dec. 30, 2007, conservative columnist George Will enthused about how he can just tell that Obama must share Will's views on race:

Obama seems to understand America's race fatigue, the unbearable

boredom occasioned by today's stale politics generally and by the perfunctory theatrics of race especially. ... The political implications of this transcendence of confining categories are many, profound and encouraging.

Yet if I could see from reading pages 274-295 in Obama's 1995 autobiography *Dreams From My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* that Obama's spiritual mentor would be campaign trouble, why couldn't Obama? You might think that such a cool-headed vivisectionist of other people's political and racial fantasies would have guessed that his surrogate father figure wouldn't let him get away with misleading the public about the ideological comradeship that led Obama to Wright in the 1980s. Unfortunately, Obama's self-pity keeps him from being as cold-eyed an analyst of himself as he is of others.

Normally, Obama is to the average politician as the great art forger Eric Hebborn was to the run-of-the-mill counterfeiter. Hebborn tried to follow a moral code of his own devising. On 17th-century paper, he would sketch in the style of, say, Rembrandt, but he would not forge Rembrandt's signature. Hebborn's view was that if Sotheby's was foolish and greedy enough to talk themselves into hoping that they were buying a Rembrandt drawing, well, that was their fault, not his.

Similarly, Obama prefers to mislead without lying outright. He likes to obscure the truth under so many

thoughtful nuances, dependent clauses, Proustian details, lawyerly evasions, and eloquent summarizations of his opponents' arguments that his audiences ultimately make up little fantasies about how he must agree with them. Like Hebborn, Obama seems to feel that he's not to blame if the press and public want to be fooled.

Sadly, though, Obama lied repeatedly, and artlessly, about the Wright sermons now posted on YouTube, asserting that he had never heard such things and they were being taken out of context. The day after Wright's National Press Club barnburner on April 28 exploded these excuses, Obama pathetically claimed, "The person I saw yesterday was not the person that I met 20 years ago."

The reality, of course, is that when the agnostic Obama discovered during his stint as a racial activist in 1980s Chicago that he needed to join a church to have a political career on the South Side, he carefully picked Wright out of all the black ministers he'd met through his job.

In fact, Obama had worried that Wright's Trinity United Church of Christ was too suffused with "middleclassness" to Fight the Power. Obama wrote on page 283 of *Dreams*:

'Some people say,' I interrupted, 'that the church is too upwardly mobile.'

The reverend's smile faded. 'That's a lot of bull,' he said sharply. ...

Still, I couldn't help wondering. ... Would the interest in maintaining

such unity [between the black classes] allow Reverend Wright to take a forceful stand on the latest proposals to reform public housing? And if men like Reverend Wright failed to take a stand, if churches like Trinity refused to engage with real power and risk genuine conflict, then what chance would there be of holding the larger community intact?

But Wright was Left enough to wow Obama with his “Audacity of Hope” sermon.

In short, the person Obama has to disown to be elected president is not Wright but the man who chose Wright: Obama’s own younger self.

His problem is similar to the one that doomed Mitt Romney’s presidential bid. We had two snapshots of Romney: the liberal Republican governor of Massachusetts a few years ago and the conservative Republican candidate of 2008. Although Romney attempted to explain some of his intellectual evolution, he couldn’t supply a compelling personal explanation for his change. Many voters decided that Romney must be a big phony and handed the GOP nomination to Yosemite Sam McCain. He may blow up the world, but at least he’ll blow it up in a straight-shootin’ manner.

Similarly, Obama, despite being a gifted memoirist, has never provided us with a plausible narrative explaining why he moved from Reverend Wright’s politics to being the post-partisan conciliator he alleges he is now. In fact, during the campaign, he hasn’t even owned up to dallying with Wright’s ideology. Ludicrously, he insists that the person who has changed is Jeremiah A. Wright, not Barack Obama.

So why won’t Obama admit that he’s matured into moderation? Perhaps, he hasn’t. In his heart of hearts, he may still

agree with Wright. Or Obama may still not know who he really is. His white mother inculcated Afrocentrism in him, teaching him that the highest calling was to lead his people politically, like his father Barack Sr. was doing in Kenya. Obama has repeatedly chosen careers in which he can use government to take from whites and give to blacks, first as a ghetto community organizer, then as a civil-rights lawyer, and finally as a politician. In each career, he has more or less failed to do anything substantial for his race—inevitably so because, contrary to what his leftist mother told him, what African-Americans lack on the whole is not political power. But though he has failed, he has failed upward, into ever more glittering jobs.

Or he may believe it’s most prudent just to try to run out the clock. After all, his opponents aren’t FDR and Reagan. They’re merely Hillary and McCain.

Because those are the alternatives, I’ll offer Obama a suggestion: When Wright first came up in March, Obama delivered a 5,000-word disquisition on race that thrilled the kind of people who like 5,000-word disquisitions (who aren’t, as it turned out, average Democratic Pennsylvania voters). Why not give another speech, a humbler, less preening, more down-to-earth one? His theme could be “I used to be way to the Left, but now I’m not, because ... I had kids.” ■

Steve Sailer is TAC's film critic and a columnist for VDARE.com.

The Road to Kuwait

Iraq War advocates overstate the difficulties of withdrawal.

By Lawrence Korb

ANY DOUBTS about whether the United States should begin to withdraw completely from Iraq’s multiple internal conflicts should have been dispelled by the recent testimony of Gen. David Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker and the Iraqi government’s foray into Basra.

Neither the general nor the ambassador could say how and when American involvement will end, or why the Iraqi government is not making meaningful political progress. The best example of progress that Crocker could point to was agreement on a new national flag. General Petraeus kept repeating that the security environment was fragile, uneven, and reversible. He could not

give a satisfactory answer to the question of whether the war in Iraq is making us safer.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki’s ill-timed and ham-handed invasion of Basra showed that his dysfunctional and corrupt government is primarily interested in improving his own electoral prospects against Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr. The Iraqi Security Forces, moreover, performed so poorly—many deserted—that the U.S. was forced to intervene in this Shia civil war to prevent Maliki’s government from collapsing. In the process, U.S. forces killed hundreds of Iraqis, undermined the counterinsurgency strategy,

and gave Sadr the justification to end his ceasefire. Finally, Iran enhanced its strategic position by brokering a truce between the warring Shi'ite leaders.

Yet when people argue that the U.S. should withdraw expeditiously, those like President Bush and Senator McCain who support an endless military commitment raise three objections: it cannot be done quickly; the situation will go to hell in a hand-basket when we leave; and our military commanders will oppose it. Each of these points is without merit.

There is significant disagreement and confusion over how much time is needed to withdraw all U.S. military forces from Iraq. The debate has gravitated between supporters of a rapid, precipitous withdrawal and those calling for a long, drawn-out redeployment. Further clouding the issue are those backing an extended redeployment over several years in order to "stay the course" in Iraq, who cherry-pick logistical issues to make the case for a long-term American presence.

MANY OF THOSE WHO SAID THAT **WE WOULD BE GREETED AS LIBERATORS** NOW POINT TO A NUMBER OF **DOOMSDAY SCENARIOS**.

Supporters of immediate withdrawal are often accused of adopting a wildly unrealistic approach. This is a misplaced critique. It is possible to effect a withdrawal in as short a time as three months, if the U.S. military effectively conducts—in the words of Iraq War veteran and military analyst Phillip Carter—an "invasion in reverse."

If the Army were ordered to withdraw to Kuwait, it could do so quickly and relatively safely. Such an exit would sacrifice a significant amount of equipment and create an instantaneous political and security vacuum similar to that created by the initial overthrow of

Saddam Hussein. While this option is feasible, it is not the best course of action.

But if the United States does not set a specific timetable, our military forces and our overall national security will remain hostage to events on the ground. Worse still, a startling development such as the assassination of the Ayatollah Sistani or a major sectarian attack could lead to an all-out civil war and compel our forces to withdraw in as little as three months.

Those who argue that a withdrawal will have to take place over a number of years, perhaps as many as four, base their analysis on the time it takes to complete a meticulous extraction and dismantling of all U.S. equipment and facilities. Such an extended timeline increases the danger to American forces and is not cost-effective.

The essential logistical point of disagreement between these approaches centers on the estimated value of what is to be withdrawn. All essential, sensitive, and costly equipment must be

safely removed, but taking out non-vital equipment like portajohns and the arduous disassembling of facilities with no military value should not be an obstacle to redeploying our troops out of harm's way and back into the fight against terrorism.

The most effective strategy for removing American troops from Iraq involves gradually withdrawing forces from the outer geographic sectors first, with the goal of reducing our military footprint and consolidating our presence before our final departure.

A phased consolidation would be a slower and more deliberate approach

than "invasion in reverse." Units would move using a combination of their own ground transportation and intra-theater air support. The American military footprint would shrink from the outside to the center, starting with withdrawal from the most northern bases. The remaining units would then redeploy from the rest of northern Iraq, followed by Diyala to the west and Anbar Province to the east. Our forces would then be consolidated in Baghdad, from where they would withdraw along the road to Kuwait, known as Route Tampa, until eventually all American forces would be gone. This could be done safely in 10 to 12 months and would result in comparatively few casualties, as it would play to our strengths.

A movement of this size is not without precedent. Between December 2003 and May 2004, more than 211,000 pieces of equipment and a quarter of a million people were moved into or out of Iraq in the largest rotation since World War II.

The next objection focuses on what will happen when we leave. Many of those who said that we would be greeted as liberators now point to a number of doomsday scenarios that might occur when we withdraw. These include a full-scale civil war, an al-Qaeda in Iraq takeover of all or part of the country, and loss of American credibility and moral standing.

Close examination reveals that these claims, like those that got us into the war, are highly exaggerated. A U.S. departure will not necessarily lead to genocide and mayhem. Iraq today belongs to Iraqis, a people with their own norms and tendencies. It is quite likely that in the absence of the cumbersome and clumsy American occupation, Iraqis will make their own bargains and compacts, thereby fending off the projected genocide and evicting outside groups like al-Qaeda.

The opponents of this senseless war seem to have far more confidence in the ability of the Iraqis to manage their affairs than do the advocates of remaining indefinitely. Moreover, once the U.S. sets a date for withdrawal, it will compel the region to claim Iraq, forcing neighboring countries to decide whether an Iraqi civil war, with all its consequences, is in their interests. If nothing else, a failed Iraq will force surrounding nations to confront another deluge of refugees on top of the 2.5 million who have already fled the country.

THE CLAIM THAT AN **AMERICAN WITHDRAWAL** FROM IRAQ WILL UNDERMINE OUR CREDIBILITY AND MORAL STANDING HAS THE **REALITY EXACTLY BACKWARD**. A WELL-MANAGED WITHDRAWAL, AS OPPOSED TO REMAINING INDEFINITELY, WILL **ENHANCE OUR CREDIBILITY**.

Faced with this reality, it is likely that the Saudis, Iranians, Syrians, Jordanians, Turks, and others will seek to mediate rather than further inflame Iraq's internal conflicts. The U.S. can move this process along by launching a diplomatic surge with these neighbors as it begins to remove its troops.

Similarly, the claim that an American withdrawal from Iraq will undermine our credibility and moral standing has the reality exactly backward. A well-managed withdrawal, as opposed to remaining indefinitely, will enhance our credibility, especially if coupled with a renewed diplomatic effort. It will restore our global reputation and allow us to focus on real threats to our national interests.

As historian Robert Dallek noted about Vietnam, "U.S. credibility was enhanced by ending a war it could not win—a war that was costing the country vital resources that it could better use elsewhere."

Finally, setting a date for a U.S. withdrawal will give Iraq's political leaders the best incentive to undertake mean-

ingful political reconciliation. The U.S. military presence allows the current dysfunctional central government to avoid making difficult decisions.

The third objection to a prompt withdrawal is that our military may oppose it. Again, those who make this argument are entirely wrong. The duty of military commanders is not to decide whether to withdraw, only how.

It was not the uniformed military who decided to invade Iraq before the job was finished in Afghanistan. Nor did they agree with Secretary of Defense

Donald Rumsfeld's prediction that a long and costly manpower-intensive post-combat operation would not be needed.

In 1969, after Richard Nixon was elected on a promise to end the war in Vietnam, the uniformed military were not keen on withdrawing. In fact, the Joint Chiefs wanted to increase our troop levels by another 200,000. But Nixon and Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird said the chiefs' job was to tell how many troops could be withdrawn safely each month. If the next president decides to withdraw, he or she will ask the military chiefs if the troops can be pulled out safely in three, six, 12, or 16 months.

In 1967, Chicago Mayor Richard Daley told President Lyndon Johnson that he needed to remove the 500,000 U.S. troops then involved in Vietnam's civil war. When Johnson responded by asking how he could do that, Daley replied, "Put them on a [expletive deleted] plane and bring them home."

It is time to follow Daley's advice. These multiple conflicts cannot be

resolved by American military power. In fact, every time we deal with one conflict we make another worse.

Case in point: the United States today independently funds approximately 90,000 predominantly Sunni militiamen across Iraq, many of whom demonstrate little allegiance to Iraq's central government and some of whom until recently were members of the insurgency attacking U.S. forces in Iraq. These Awakening groups have made it clear that their allegiance is to their own religious sect and Sunni tribes, not the Iraqi government or the United States. Their probable return to the insurgency will ultimately—and perhaps quickly—undermine the security progress that has been made.

In recent weeks, the United States has also provided military air and ground support to one side in an intra-Shia civil war that has raged throughout the southern and central parts of Iraq. The Bush administration continues to provide unconditional and open-ended backing to an Iraqi central government bitterly divided along sectarian and ethnic lines. In these ways, the United States has made a lasting national reconciliation more elusive by supporting different sides in the country's internal conflicts through separate channels. Today, Iraq is no closer to becoming a dependable and independent ally in the fight against radical Islamists than it was in January 2007. And the United States is less secure than it was 17 months ago.

The time to implement a strategic reset of U.S. military and diplomatic strategy in Iraq and around the region is long overdue. ■

Lawrence Korb, assistant secretary of defense in the Reagan administration, is a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress and a senior adviser to the Center for Defense Information.

Turning on to J Street

A new lobby re-examines the special relationship.

By Michael Brendan Dougherty

UPON LEAVING OFFICE in 2004, Democratic Sen. Ernest Hollings said what many of his colleagues surely felt: “You can’t have an Israeli policy other than what AIPAC gives you around here.” Jeremy Ben-Ami, the executive director of a new lobbying group, J Street, plans to change that.

Ben-Ami told reporters during J Street’s launch, “The term, ‘pro-Israel’ has been hijacked by those who hold views that a majority of Americans—Jews and non-Jews alike—oppose, whether supporting the war in Iraq, beating the drums for war with Iran, or putting obstacles in the path to ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”

Once dedicated to the goal of strengthening the relationship between the United States and Israel, groups like the American Israel Public Affairs Committee have lately seemed more interested in strengthening the hand of Likud in Israel while advancing the arguments of neo-conservatives in Washington.

David Kimche, a former director general of the Israeli foreign ministry and a supporter of J Street, outlined the need for an alternative in the *Jerusalem Post*: “AIPAC has become more militant than the Israeli government. Its messages reflect more the oppositionist Likud doctrine than the moderate stance of Prime Minister Olmert. Moreover, whereas ... some 80 percent of the Jewish voters traditionally cast their votes for the Democrats, AIPAC is geared to an extreme-right-wing agenda, often more in line with the Jewish neo-cons than with the majority of American Jews.”

“They have come to promote another agenda,” Ben-Ami says, “Our agenda is that we believe the security of Israel, the survival of Israel, depends in large measure on whether or not it can resolve these conflicts peacefully with its neighbors. This is also in America’s best interest.”

J Street has two components: an advocacy group that will try to open America’s debate about Israel and a PAC that will be able to make political donations. Of course, the “J” in the name evokes the predominantly Jewish character of the organization, but it has other connotations. “J” is missing from the alphabetically named streets of D.C.—the city’s planner, Pierre-Charles L’Enfant, omitted it from his design as an insult to Supreme Court Justice John Jay. If such an avenue did exist, it would run parallel to K Street, the address that is synonymous with the federal city’s most powerful lobbies.

Billionaire George Soros was briefly associated with the project but pulled out before the launch so that the new group would not be saddled with his controversial, and left-wing, associations. Still, J Street has raised nearly \$1.9 million for its first year—impressive for a start-up. More impressive is the list of prominent Israelis who have signed a letter of support. The roster includes military men like Maj. Gen. Amos Lapidot, former head of the Israeli Air Force, and Maj. Gen. Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, former chief of staff of the IDF; politicians like Amran Mitzna, former head of the Labor Party; and religious figures like Rabbi Levi Weiman-Kelman of Kehilat Kol haNeshama in Jerusalem.

Another signatory, Daniel Levy, is a member of J Street’s advisory council and was part of the Israeli delegation to the Taba Summit with the Palestinians in January 2001. Levy says, “The easiest thing the J Street people found in the lead up to the launch was getting that list of top-notch Israelis in support.”

But that doesn’t guarantee that they will be able to effect a revolution in American politics. AIPAC’s operating budget is 50 times larger than J Street’s, and it has a formidable reputation to match. One senator anonymously told a *Washington Post* reporter in 1991, “My colleagues think AIPAC is a very, very powerful organization that is ruthless, and very, very alert.” In 2002, Morris Amitay, a former director of AIPAC, expressed perfect confidence in his group’s position on Capitol Hill: “I don’t see any prospect that any member of the U.S. Congress, the House or Senate, would say, ‘Let’s take a balanced position between Israel and the Palestinians and negotiate a peace agreement.’” Crossing the Israel lobby, Amitay continued, would be “politically suicidal.”

Ben-Ami laughs at the outsized nature of his task, “No question it’s a David versus Goliath situation. ... [J Street] will be outmanned, outgunned, and outfunded.”

An obvious question arises: Since AIPAC’s leadership has historically reflected the interests of the Israeli government and then pitched its policies in terms that are ideologically compatible with the White House, wouldn’t the election of a Labor government in Tel Aviv and a Democratic one in Washington

steer AIPAC away from its hawkish position? Critics of the powerful lobby say no, contending that AIPAC's leaders are too paranoid about the future security of Israel and have committed themselves to an ideology that abhors peacemaking.

M.J. Rosenberg, director of policy analysis at the Israel Policy Forum, points to a generation gap among the traditional Jewish American lobbying groups. "AIPAC and ZOA [Zionist Organization of America] mostly represent older Jews, who live in a world where Israel is very fragile and is always afraid for its life," he says. "It's an old paradigm for an old generation." This leads these groups to separate themselves from the bulk of American Jews and embrace extremist Christians: "The AIPAC side is way, way out of step with Jewish opinion. And that is why they've turned so heavily to the Christian Right. Who is both pro-Israel and against the two-state solution? John Hagee. That's why he was at their conference last year."

Levy agrees that a fundamental change in direction of Jewish lobbying groups makes other voices necessary. "The mainstream pro-Israel camp has decided so brazenly to throw its lot in with neoconservative ideologues within this administration and with the far Right dispensationalist Christian Zionists, and this unholy triangle has pulled things so much to the right-wing direction that we are desperately in need of a corrective. And we're in a time when the Middle East is not some low-level priority that the United States can delve into or not. This is affecting Iran policy, Iraq exit-strategy—it affects how you look at the entire Muslim world and political Islam."

Further, Levy argues that a new voice is vital in America because the debate in Israel is changing. "Looking at it from an Israeli perspective, it's very difficult to trot out that line, 'Whatever is good for the Israeli government of the day, that's what American Jews, or Israel's friends

in America, should be supporting.' The fact is, Israelis are divided today. If you stick to that old line, on one day you'll say, 'Settle the land, maintain the occupation.' And the next day, 'Settlements are bad, we need a two-state solution or Israel is finished.'" When everything in Israeli politics is up for grabs, Levy says, it's not good enough to say, "Look, you've just got to be pro-Israel."

The starting point, he adds, is understanding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the context of an occupation—one that places tremendous financial, military, and moral burdens on the occupier, Israel, and incites hatred and terrorism against America. Levy's critics respond that the fault is not with Israelis who are trying to maintain security but with Arabs who reject the existence of Israel altogether.

Morton Klein is one of those critics. The president of the Zionist Organization of America believes J Street is just another group ready to sell out Israel's interests. He asks rhetorically why they exist at all, when AIPAC "already says that Abbas is a voice for peace and already advocates for a two-state solution. What exactly makes them different? They won't tell you that they want one-sided concessions [from Israel]. That is clearly what they support. ... We gave them Gaza, and what did we get in return? More rockets fired into Israel." Klein points to continued intransigence on the part of Palestinian leadership, noting that the Oslo Accords require the PLO to discontinue its incitement of

terror. "Look at what they teach their children, in the textbooks." Klein chastises J Street for not recognizing that Palestinian political leaders hang posters that explicitly refer to the destruction of Israel: "Why don't they denounce this? It's every appeasement play in the book." He refers to one of J Street's supporters, Avraham Burg, a former speaker of the Knessett, as a "traitor to Israel."

Rosenberg counters that smear tactics don't work anymore: "The AIPAC side has never met Palestinian leadership that they consider credible. Period. They always say, 'Well, what about the textbooks—that they're anti-Semitic.' What about this preacher who said this or that?" The Israelis have their crazies, too. But peace is made by the moderates."

Levy, who made his reputation trying to negotiate peace, also dismisses the call to panic at the appearance of each hostile poster or preacher. "The idea that an occupied people must first provide security to the occupier and then under those conditions you do de-occupation doesn't exist in the real world. That's being unserious about Israeli security. Yes, there is incitement. And yes, something should be done about it on all sides. But if you think that 580 obstacles to freedom of movement in the West Bank, the humiliation of checkpoints, and the expansion of settlements are not factors that incite Palestinians to consider violent approaches, but something shown on a TV station that almost no one watches is, then you are just not serious." Referring to Al Aqsa's children's

Daniel Larison **EUNOMIA**
www.amconmag.com/larison *n. the principle of good order*

"Beyond sheer knowledge, Larison possesses an old man's wisdom rare in someone young enough to have that much energy."

Steve Sailer, isteve.blogspot.com

program about a *jihadi* mouse, Levy calls this “the Mickey Mouse approach to fighting terrorism.”

Ben-Ami is confident that J Street won't be smeared as “an enemy of Israel” composed of “self-hating Jews,” noting that his grandparents were a founding family of Tel Aviv, that his relatives suffered in the Holocaust, and that while living in Israel he was almost killed in a terror attack. “Of course, Marty Peretz, Alan Dershowitz, the folks at *Commentary* and *The Weekly Standard* are going to take their shots,” he admits, “but they're not going to be able to shout us down.” Levy believes that confidence will be contagious. “I think other groups that care about this issue feel more comfortable expressing a sensible position on the Middle East when there is also a very credible and hopefully very loud Jewish voice saying, ‘This is the most pro-American and pro-Israeli position you can take’... just like you can be a pro-American patriot and be against bombing Iran and staying in Iraq for 100 years.”

But changing policies and a political culture that shivers at the word “even-handed” will take more than confidence. One senate staffer who wished to remain anonymous pointed to the real clout of groups like AIPAC: “Look at John Sununu's race in New Hampshire.” Pro-Israel PACs lavished \$44,000 on his would-be opponent Katrina Swett, the daughter of Tom Lantos, a hawkish supporter of Israel. Now that Swett has dropped out, they will probably back Gov. Jeanne Shaheen, who received over \$72,000 from these same organizations to oppose Sununu in 2002. AIPAC also gave embattled Republican Norm Coleman \$31,000 last year. If money talks, J Street will make its first peep when it writes a check to Coleman's pro-peace opponent, Al Franken.

One Middle East adviser to a GOP senator told *TAC* that J Street can make a difference even while it's underfunded.

“If you are a junior staff member for a member of Congress or a senator and someone hands you something and says, ‘This is good, and it will pass, and we'd like to have your support,’ and it's a resolution that says the Six Day War was a great thing, it will suddenly have 60 cosponsors. J Street can be the group to make the other call and say, ‘We can reword this to honor the soldiers who died, but also the people who died on the other side as well and mention that the issues in that conflict are still unresolved.’” These gestures may seem like a small thing to the average congressman,

but “the people in the region see them as important signs of America's attitude.”

Despite Ben-Ami's confidence that his background and the credibility of J Street's supporters insulate his group from the worst smears, it has already been called anti-Israel. *Commentary* referred to its policies as “paternalism” and charged it with “diplomatic fetishism.” But Ben-Ami is unfazed: “We want to talk about the issues and have a reality-based discussion. If you want to answer our arguments by calling us names, that's fine. But we're going to win the argument.” ■

Unreality Check

America can't borrow its way back to solvency.

By Dennis Dale

AT THE END OF JANUARY, President Bush and Congress passed an economic stimulus plan, the central component of which is a scheme whereby the U.S. government borrows and distributes a minimum of \$110 billion to low- and middle-income taxpayers, purportedly to replenish a fraction of the money being sucked into the vortex created by the sinking housing market and plummeting dollar. On April 25, the first wave of payments went out, four days ahead of schedule. By the end of June, 130 million Americans will have received checks—up to \$600 per person, \$1,200 per couple, \$300 per child.

“This package will help American families increase their purchasing power and help offset the high prices that we're seeing at the gas pump and the grocery store,” President Bush said.

But where does the money come from? Some conservatives have been

crowding about American taxpayers getting back some of their hard earned dollars. They seem to have forgotten that we no longer have a rich uncle. Sam is broke. The federal debt already stands at \$3 trillion, and when you're in the red, a dollar spent is a dollar borrowed. The rebate checks are essentially loans from foreign governments—which we'll dutifully use to buy their wares.

There is no economic justification for the redistributive pilferage of stimulus programs that sink us further in debt and reinforce the very habits that put us there. But there is, of course, a political rationale, and even respected old pundits like David Broder helpfully chipped in with praise for the bipartisan hustle that the less astute might have confused with desperation.

As it did after 9/11, with the economy faltering and confidence shaken, the administration is urging people to shop.

Pitching in, Wal-Mart is offering to cash rebate checks for free, if you have the unfortunate habit of cashing your checks at Wal-Mart. Uncle Sam wants you... to be a wastrel. (Picture his top hat unsteadily perched on the tawny conch shell that shades Donald Trump's debauched pout).

Once growth became both the means and end of our deindustrializing economy, and as the quantification of the net effect on growth of various human actions became the closest approximation of passion an economist's heart can muster, it was only a matter of time before profligacy became civic virtue. We haven't yet designated frugality a vice, but the implication is certainly there.

But it's the economy we've created, not the economy that has created us. Frugality is a form of modesty, after all, and modesty was the first virtue of the old order dispatched by the sexual revolution. It is no match for our unprecedented combination of personal liberty, technological sophistication, and material wealth. The resulting democratic vulgarization of luxury has proven to be an economic boon, but we can't tally the loss of dignity, for this same process has rendered us incapable of recognizing it. We pull another scam on ourselves: the notion that nothing is lost in the march of progress, that all of its casualties are incidental.

It is understandable that the individual citizen takes no significant shame in maxing out credit cards and borrowing against his home at the first opportunity, and little more if the result is bankruptcy. He follows the state's lead in going into perpetual debt, and the state follows his.

If the state has become a nanny, it isn't a very good one, reinforcing our worst habits most in those who can afford them least. Even in redistributing (for the sake of brevity here) "wealth" downward, the government's plan does

the less prosperous half of the population the humiliating disservice of singling it out in its peculiar promotion of vice. One could go all day cataloguing the curious inversions of order in our topsy-turvy new world.

Ignorance of—or failing that, complicity in—the economic farce is encouraged. The citizen is "given" a "rebate" from an insolvent treasury, borrowed in part from him, in part from abroad. (It's not accurate to say primarily from China, as Japan still holds more of our debt, at least for the moment. China has the second biggest claim.) It is a gimmick embedded in the gimmick that is the tax "refund."

To the extent that we consider our actions, we are openly accepting the long-term cost of our economic voodoo, incanting away to keep the inflationary zombie animated and moving, making as if it's alive. Most expect the next boom to get us out of hock with no appreciable level of pain. The tax rebate is, above all, a plan for avoiding pain—in other words, responsibility—no matter how urgent the warning that pain conveys and how overdue its proper corrective.

There is almost a desultory feel to our desperate measures, and what they lack in imagination they make up for in directness. Government-financed make-work once involved building things. The products of FDR's Depression-era initiatives stand as defiant monuments to their well-documented lack of economic justification. Entire ecosystems were encased in concrete, regions wired with electricity, rivers dammed, bridges built, and all at the surly, stubborn pace of government work. Such grand programs are now out of the question—unless they divert obscene sums into the defense industry—but not because we've adopted the conservative virtues of solvency and limited government. *Au contraire*. There is a certain ironic effi-

ciency to government largesse now. "Just get the money into the hands of the dopes," one imagines somebody saying. "We are Americans. We buy things."

Various stores are preparing sales, and some have already lamented the lower prices dampening the intended stimulus effect. One pundit suggested that the government issue rebates in the form of debit cards, citing the promising example of Hurricane Katrina victims squandering relief funds provided that way. Another joked that he'd seen a government official stop a man on the street and demand to know why he was carrying idle money in his pocket. Laugh, but remember how things said in jest tend eventually to come to pass—and a determined and disingenuous government can produce very creative ways of compelling consumption.

Saving your money is now akin to letting fields go fallow. Living within your means is an antisocial act. Economic growth, regardless of its composition or effects, trumps all other concerns. Indeed, concern for the non-economic effects of policy is morally disreputable in current political discourse.

No longer content to stay home militarily, making things and balancing our books, we have developed an economy to which thrift and modesty are detrimental, waste and excess beneficial. It's a perpetual boom mentality attempting to manifest perpetual boom through power of will. But until that happens, we're essentially borrowing money to spend it, as our production continually lags behind our appetite.

Our diligent government stands ready to print as many dollars as it takes for as long as it takes. How much longer foreign governments will be willing to do their part by absorbing our excess is anyone's guess. ■

Dennis Dale's blog, Untethered, can be found at www.dennisdale.blogspot.com.

McCain Missing in Action

IF JOHN MCCAIN wins the presidency, his comeback—after the bankrupt debacle his campaign had become in the summer of 2007 with his backing of the amnesty bill—will be the stuff of legend.

And as nominee, he is entitled to conduct his own campaign and be cut slack by a party whose brand name is now Enron.

That said, McCain seems to have decided to win by love-bombing the Big Media and putting miles between himself and the base.

Consider his “Forgotten Places” tour. It began in Selma, Ala., where McCain went to Edmund Pettis Bridge to hail John Lewis and the marchers night-sticked and hosed down by the Alabama State Troopers on the Montgomery march for voting rights.

Now that was a seminal movement in the fight for civil rights. But this is not 1965. Today, John Lewis is a big dog in the “No-Whites-Need-Apply!” Black Caucus. The Rev. Jeremiah Wright is sermonizing White America. The Rev. Al Sharpton is trying to shut down the Big Apple. And the fight for equal rights is being led by Ward Connerly.

With no help from McCain, Connerly is trying to put on five state ballots a Civil Rights Initiative that declares white men are also equal and not to be denied their civil rights because of the color of their skin.

And where does McCain stand? From Selma, McCain went to the Gee’s Bend Quilters Collective, where black ladies make the famous blankets. The stop could not but call to mind the hundreds of thousands of textile and apparel jobs in the Carolinas and Georgia lost after NAFTA and Most Favored Nation status for China, both of which McCain enthusiastically supported.

McCain’s next stop was Inez, Ky., where LBJ declared war on poverty. But LBJ’s war was a politically motivated scheme to shift wealth and power to government, which led to a pathological dependency among America’s poor, his own abdication, and Ronald Reagan’s 1980 campaign against Big Government that ushered in the Conservative Decade.

McCain then went to New Orleans to backhand Bush for failing to act swiftly to rescue the victims of Katrina. But the real failure of New Orleans was of the corrupt and incompetent regime of Mayor Ray Nagin and the men of New Orleans, who left 30,000 women and children stranded in a sea of stagnant water. No doubt Bush hit the snooze button, but why the piling on?

Then McCain headed up to Youngstown, Ohio to tell the folks their jobs are never coming back and NAFTA was a sweet deal. But why, when America’s mini-mills and steel mills are among the most efficient on earth—in terms of man hours needed to produce a ton of steel—aren’t those jobs coming back?

Answer: it is due to the free-trade policies of Bush and McCain, which permit trade rivals to impose value-added taxes of 15 to 20 percent on steel imports from the United States while rebating those taxes on steel exports to the United States. We are getting it in the neck coming and going.

An America First trade and tax policy could have U.S. steel mills rising again, while those in Japan, China, Russia, and Brazil would be shutting down as uncompetitive in the U.S. market. But we no longer put America first.

The U.S. government burns its incense at the altar of the Global Economy. The losers are those guys in Youngstown that McCain was lecturing

on the beauty of NAFTA. And the winners are the CEOs who pull down seven-, eight-, and even nine-figure annual packages selling out their country for the corporation.

Does McCain think \$6 trillion in trade deficits since NAFTA, a dollar rotting away, and 3.5 million manufacturing jobs lost under Bush were all inevitable? Does he think we can do nothing to stop the deindustrialization of a country that used to produce 96 percent of all it consumed?

Why should those guys in Youngstown vote for McCain? So the feds can teach them how to shovel snow?

Even Hillary, whose husband negotiated NAFTA with Newt Gingrich and Bob Dole’s help, now gets it.

Then McCain took a time out to denounce the North Carolina GOP for ads tying the Reverend Wright to Obama and the pair to two Democratic congressional candidates. To their credit, the North Carolinians told McCain where to get off and are running the ads.

What does a McCain victory mean for conservatives? Probably a veto on tax hikes and perhaps a fifth justice like Antonin Scalia, Clarence Thomas, Samuel Alito, or John Roberts to turn two pair into a full house. Fifty years after Warren, it could be game, set, match for the Right.

But McCain may also mean more Middle East wars, more bellicosity, more manufacturing jobs lost, malingering in the culture wars, and more illegal aliens and amnesty.

In Pennsylvania, thousands of Republicans re-registered to vote Democratic, and 27 percent of the GOP votes went to Mike Huckabee or Ron Paul. McCain may just stretch this rubber band so far it snaps back in his face. ■

Less Perfect Unions

The argument against same-sex marriage that hasn't been tried in the courts

By Margaret Liu McConnell

HERE'S AN ETIQUETTE question for the new age: You are introduced to a couple and their little girl. The men are clean cut, early middle-aged. Their child is well behaved and, by all appearances, well taken care of. Is it rude to ask the men how they came by their daughter?

Same-sex couples first challenged state marriage laws in the 1970s. Courts in California, Wisconsin, Kentucky, and Minnesota tersely ruled that they couldn't marry because same-sex marriage was a definitional impossibility.

A second wave of same-sex challenges to marriage laws began in Hawaii in the early 1990s. The state attempted the old defense that same-sex couples could not wed because of "their biologic inability ... to satisfy the definition of the status to which they aspire." The high court of Hawaii rejected the state's argument as an exercise in "tortured and conclusory sophistry."

What a leap from the courts' confident dismissal of such claims in the 1970s. The main reason for this sea change has been the presence of children in the lives of gays and lesbians. While same-sex advocates insist that marriage is not inextricably linked to procreation, every victory for same-sex couples in the courts that has accorded marriage or marriage-like rights statewide, has hinged on the fact that children were involved.

The essence of marriage in this country has always been that two people pledge publicly and to each other to bind their lives together, to take care of one another and any children their sexual union produces. Although same-sex

advocates demand the freedom to marry—the recognition of what they view as a constitutionally guaranteed liberty interest—the essential promise of marriage is a loss of freedom. A married person is no longer solely concerned with his own life but has to worry about another's—and, if the couple is blessed with children, with that many more lives.

The state supports and honors this promise. While marriage does not require procreation, the status the state accords the couple is linked to the promise that they will not abandon, give away, or leave their child to the public charge.

The right to marry, then, is not just the right to the rather recent multitude of financial and social benefits but the right to support and recognition from the state of one's promise to fulfill what is at once the most simple and obvious of duties and the most profound, time-consuming, and liberty-killing.

This essential promise of marriage still holds, except in Massachusetts—which brings us back to the opening etiquette question. Is it rude to ask the two men how they came by their child? If they are married, what precisely is the state of Massachusetts honoring and supporting by sanctioning their marriage? Their devotion to one another, yes, but no longer the ideal that one should stick around and take care of one's child. It's clear that at least one of the little girl's biological parents has either given her up or died. Even if the child was deliberately conceived via reproductive technology, a woman somewhere is willfully without her biological child—perhaps in

a spirit of helping the men but in a spirit nonetheless contradicting the ideal that no parent should relinquish his or her child. Perhaps the little girl is adopted. Agencies assisting adoptive parents advise them to do their utmost to make the biological parent formally relinquish all rights to his child. Marriage in Massachusetts, then, no longer upholds the ideal that society is served when parents keep their children but, in effect, encourages its contradiction.

If marriage no longer honors this ideal, our culture is left with no institution that does. That is what would be lost in expanding marriage to include same-sex couples.

Focusing on this loss may be the only viable legal argument left to defend traditional marriage, given changes in constitutional jurisprudence regarding the rights of homosexuals. Legal arguments insisting on the superiority of the traditional family have backfired from outset.

In 1991, three same-sex couples sued the state of Hawaii, claiming its marriage laws deprived them of a multiplicity of rights and benefits. Hawaii countered that marriage creates the best environment for children. At trial, however, even witnesses for the state agreed that single parents, adoptive parents, lesbian mothers, gay fathers, and same-sex couples can and do create stable families and make excellent parents. Finding Hawaii had failed to prove a compelling government interest, as required by Hawaii's Equal Rights Amendment when a law discriminates on the basis of sex, the court ruled that

the state could not deny the couples marriage licenses. The people took matters in hand, amending the state constitution to protect marriage. Although same-sex advocates did not succeed in changing Hawaii's marriage laws, they advanced their agenda in this important aspect: they demonstrated just how difficult it is to prove in court that a traditional family provides a better environment for children than other family configurations.

stitution is far less deferential to the legislature, and even where no fundamental right is at issue, and no suspect class affected, requires the court to scrutinize any disparate treatment. The court rejected all interests proffered by the state for excluding same-sex couples from marriage, chief among them promoting the "link between procreation and child rearing." These proffered interests made no sense, the court concluded, because Vermont's legislative policies

were "born of animosity toward the class of persons affected" and had no rational relation to any legitimate government purpose. This is a statement of the amendment's failure to pass the rational basis test. The court did not defer to the governmental interests Colorado claimed the law served—respect for other citizens' freedom of association—as rational basis review would ordinarily require. Justice Scalia pointed out in his dissent another interest furthered by the amendment—the moral disapproval of homosexual conduct. He cited the court's 1986 decision *Bowers v. Hardwick*, which upheld a Georgia statute making sodomy a crime, as requiring courts to defer to this governmental interest.

But in 2003, the Supreme Court overruled *Bowers*. In *Lawrence v. Texas*, a man caught in the act and convicted under a Texas statute prohibiting homosexual intercourse sued the state. The court struck down the statute as furthering no legitimate state interest, overruling its previous decision, *Bowers*, for upholding a law whose basis was the traditional condemnation of homosexuality. Together, *Romer* and *Lawrence* suggest that the Supreme Court may have set a new standard for deciding whether a law is "rational" where homosexual rights are at issue.

Citations from *Romer* and *Lawrence* permeate *Goodridge v. Department of Public Health*, the 2003 Massachusetts decision extending marriage to same-sex couples. Massachusetts had posited three governmental interests for its marriage laws: providing a favorable setting for procreation, ensuring the optimal environment for child rearing, and preserving financial resources. The court agreed loudly that protecting the welfare of children is a "paramount State policy," but, like the Vermont court, concluded that restricting marriage to opposite-sex couples "cannot plausibly fur-

HOW COULD VERMONT RECOGNIZE SAME-SEX PARTNERS AS PARENTS YET DENY THEM AND THEIR CHILDREN THE SECURITY IT GIVES MARRIED COUPLES?

Alaska was next, with a similar outcome. A trial court ruled in 1998 that the fundamental right to marriage encompassed the right to marry the partner of one's choosing—including a partner of the same sex. Again, the people of the state mobilized to amend their constitution to protect marriage from court-imposed change.

Then, in 1999, Vermont's high court held that same-sex couples are entitled to the same benefits afforded by state law to opposite-sex couples, leading to the enactment of a civil-union law the following year. The court based its decision on its state constitution, contrasting it with the U.S. Constitution. Under the U.S. Constitution, a law is presumed valid if it bears a rational relation to some legitimate purpose as long as it does not restrict a fundamental right and as long as it does not unequally affect a "suspect" or "quasi-suspect" class (a group the court has reason to suspect the legislature singled out for disparate treatment because of animus). The Supreme Court recognizes race and national origin as suspect classes, but neither the Supreme Court nor the vast majority of other courts deems homosexuals a suspect class. Vermont's con-

stitution is far less deferential to the legislature, and even where no fundamental right is at issue, and no suspect class affected, requires the court to scrutinize any disparate treatment. The court rejected all interests proffered by the state for excluding same-sex couples from marriage, chief among them promoting the "link between procreation and child rearing." These proffered interests made no sense, the court concluded, because Vermont's legislative policies

supported same-sex families, even allowing same-sex couples to adopt. How could Vermont recognize same-sex partners as parents yet deny them and their children the security it gives married couples?

The Vermont and Hawaii courts based their decisions on provisions of their constitutions not present in the federal Constitution. So they set no binding precedent beyond their own borders. But two U.S. Supreme Court decisions bring to the fore the question of whether the U.S. Constitution, when the rights of homosexuals are at issue, requires the same kind of probing rational basis test—one that looks at the full scheme of laws related to the purported governmental interest—required by Vermont.

In 1996, in *Romer v. Evans*, the Supreme Court struck down an amendment to the Colorado constitution adopted in reaction to antidiscrimination ordinances in Aspen, Denver, and Boulder. The amendment repealed those ordinances to the extent they prohibited discrimination against homosexuals and prevented any further legislation from barring such discrimination. The court concluded that the amend-

ther this policy.” The court declared that the plaintiffs’ children, “like all children, need and should have the fullest opportunity to grow up in a secure, protected family unit.” The court dealt its final blow to marriage in Massachusetts from the high ground of racial civil rights:

Recognizing the right of an individual to marry a person of the same sex will not diminish the validity or dignity of opposite-sex marriage, any more than recognizing the right of an individual to marry a person of a different race devalues the marriage of a person who marries someone of her own race.

In *Goodridge*, the court ostensibly applies a rational basis test. But rather than deferring to the government, it delves into and dismisses the government’s asserted interests. And for support, it uses *Romer* and *Lawrence*, U.S. Supreme Court decisions construing the U.S. Constitution. In Vermont and Hawaii, the precedential power of the decisions was limited to those states because they construed only their state constitutions. But *Romer* and *Lawrence*, if the U.S. Supreme Court were to confirm the interpretation given to them by the Massachusetts court and subsequently by numerous other state courts, would have a binding effect on all courts in the country, state and federal.

Such a decision would allow plaintiffs to reopen challenges to state marriage laws and to challenge state constitutional amendments and would require courts to apply the new, more searching rational basis test. In Vermont, Massachusetts, and numerous states to follow, the state’s interest in “providing the optimal environment for raising children” consistently fails this test.

Post-*Lawrence*, state high courts have decided challenges to marriage laws in two ways. Either the court proceeds wearily under ordinary rational

basis review, deferring to the legislature to uphold marriage laws (Arizona, New York, Maryland, Washington), or the court demands that the state provide justification for excluding same-sex couples, only to strike down or alter the laws on the grounds that there is no rational basis for causing the children of same-sex couples to suffer when the public policy of the state sanctions the formation of such families (New Jersey, joining Massachusetts). Decisions upholding state marriage laws, however, are not necessarily “wins” for traditional marriage. They are stepping stones toward a showdown over the meaning of *Romer* and *Lawrence*, where a split between states in their interpretation of the cases is a prerequisite for review by the Supreme Court. The *Lawrence* majority is still sitting.

Undoubtedly discouraged by the outcome of cases in Hawaii, Vermont, and Massachusetts, some states—New Jersey, Connecticut, California—abandoned their marriage-is-best-for-children argument. But when you take away the child-based reasons for reserving marriage to one man and one woman, it doesn’t really leave much else. New Jersey rested its case on its interest in preserving “age-old traditions, beliefs, and laws”—and lost. The state high court reviewed New Jersey’s system of child-related laws, including those that allow adoption by homosexuals and prohibit unequal treatment on account of sexual orientation. The court found “no rational basis” for visiting on plaintiffs’ children “a flawed and unfair scheme directed at their parents.” The New Jersey court, like the Massachusetts court, cited *Romer* and *Lawrence* together with its own law as protecting “gays and lesbians from sexual orientation discrimination in all its virulent forms.” In 2006, the court ordered New Jersey to “provide to committed same-sex couples, on equal terms, the full

rights and benefits enjoyed by heterosexual married couples.”

In the early cases, same-sex plaintiffs sued for the rights and benefits afforded by marriage, which states could provide through a parallel civil-union structure, as New Jersey did to comply with the court’s order. Plaintiffs now demand nothing short of the right to marry. This leaves courts that are reluctant to redefine marriage to fall back into the sort of deferential rational basis defense of marriage laws that may be counter to the current Supreme Court view of the rights of homosexuals. *Romer* and *Lawrence* are unclear decisions. But it’s not only activist judges who read them as requiring states to justify the exclusion of homosexuals from marriage and as rejecting tradition as a rational basis for upholding marriage laws. This was the point of Justice Scalia’s white-hot dissent in *Lawrence*. Marriage won’t be lost through dramatic high court decisions declaring same-sex marriage a fundamental right. That theory has won scarce times in the lower courts, including a recent Iowa trial court decision. But it has never survived the highest state tribunals. Marriage will be lost if its defenders fail to articulate a governmental interest that withstands post-*Lawrence* rational basis review.

Indiana’s high court, upholding the state’s marriage laws in 2005, latched on to an asserted state interest that did not

Visit our new blog



updated daily

entail a “contest of the families.” In short, the “accidental child” defense posits that heterosexuals are just rutting bumpkins who can’t control their sexual impulses, don’t understand biology, and end up making babies. They need marriage to channel their children into stable environments. But because same-sex parents must invest “significant time, effort and expense” in “assisted reproduction and adoption,” the court brightly deduced, they are likely to be responsible persons who will provide a stable environment with or without marriage.

We await decisions from the high courts of California and Connecticut. California already provides same-sex couples with nearly all the rights and benefits of marriage through domestic partnership; Connecticut provides an identity of rights through its civil-union statute. Plaintiffs in both states reject these solutions as an insulting reprise of the heinous “separate but equal” scheme.

The California court seems to be seeking a way to preserve marriage as a status distinct from same-sex unions. It requested from plaintiffs a list of all ways California’s domestic partnership scheme falls short of providing the same rights as marriage. Yet it bids fair to collapse under the onslaught of amicus briefs filed against the state by more than 200 organizations and individuals, ranging from the California NAACP, La Raza Centro Legal, the American Psychological Association, the National Association of Social Workers, and the Anti-Defamation League. These advocates for same-sex marriage attack on two fronts of moral righteousness: denying marriage to same-sex couples hurts children, and barring persons of the same sex from marrying is no different from barring persons of different races from marrying.

Now is not the time for defenders of marriage to give up on the courts. But we must recognize that insisting that tradi-

tional marriage is best for raising children is not effective. A better approach is to emphasize that traditional marriage promotes the ideal that no parent should abandon his child. Who would argue against that? It’s consistent with other governmental policies in the area of child welfare. It’s in accord with human nature. But making the argument requires the courage, honesty, and humility to say that some ways of procreating are not as good for the general welfare as others, whether the parents are of the same sex or are married heterosexuals.

Adoptive parents do God’s work when they provide homes to children, and those homes can be as loving and stable as the home of any natural mother and father. But adoption is a humane response to what is already a tragedy in a child’s life, the loss of a parent. Those adorable adoptees from China, for example, are the byproduct of a cruel policy of child restriction that has led to the deaths of thousands of children.

Reproductive technology, like adoption, without doubt can produce children who are loved by their new parents in homes as stable as those of any biological parents. But the various techniques, when employed by same-sex couples, always require that at least one of the child’s natural parents give up the child. This tempting world of sperm banks and egg brokers is the domain of the affluent and easily verges toward eugenics.

Adoption and reproductive technology as methods of forming our next generation are no foundation for a stable society. Social order doesn’t depend on parents being forced to give up their children for adoption because of poverty, illness, supposed unfitness, or the brutal policies of a foreign country—nor on parents giving up their children in advance of birth in sterile, scientific transactions. Those historical Supreme Court cases

declaring marriage a fundamental right lauded the stability-promoting aspects of marriage, emphasizing the good that radiates throughout the broader society from the promise the man and woman make on their wedding day: “Marriage ... creat[es] the most important relation in life ... having more to do with the morals and civilization of a people than any other institution.” “Upon it society may be said to be built, and out of its fruits spring social relations and social obligations and duties.” The promise of the married couple to keep and care for one another and for their children engenders a respect for unconditional responsibility that serves us all.

Extending marriage to same-sex couples would leave no other institution to promote the ideal that every parent promises to care for his child. It’s easier for fathers to walk away from their responsibilities when society no longer promotes the simple norm that a child belongs to both parents equally, and each has a duty to care for the child—the norm encompassed in traditional marriage. As the NAACP, La Raza Centro Legal, and the National Association of Social Workers know, the pain and deprivation caused by the erosion of this norm fall hardest on the poor.

This essential promise of marriage regarding children cannot, by its nature, be fulfilled by same-sex couples. To those who ask how reserving marriage for one man and one woman is any different from yesteryear’s vile prohibition against interracial marriage, the answer is evident in the faces of the often exquisitely beautiful children of mixed-race couples, belonging to and beloved by both parents, relinquished by neither. ■

Margaret Liu McConnell is an attorney based in Washington, D.C. She has also written for Commentary and National Review.

Establishing Obama

In the wake of the controversy over his condescending remarks about small-town Americans at a San Francisco fundraiser in early April, Barack Obama lost the

Pennsylvania primary by nine points, falling behind Hillary Clinton in the rural counties of the state by as many as 50. The results confirmed the limits of his voting coalition—predominantly young, urban, liberal, and black voters—just as his remarks in San Francisco seemed to crystallize the image of Obama as a professorial progressive who derogates culturally conservative whites while arrogating to himself the role of social scientist in chief. Hoping to span the gap between his donor base and the voting bloc that has continued to elude him throughout the primaries, Obama attempted to justify to an urban liberal audience the cultural attitudes and habits of rural and small-town voters and was rightly pilloried as an elitist for his efforts.

While the tag may still be political poison in the primaries in Indiana, Kentucky, and West Virginia, Obama can take some satisfaction from having been attacked as an elitist, since it is a mark of how far he has risen and how fully he has been accepted into the upper echelons. As he and his supporters never tire of mentioning, Obama was raised by his grandparents and his mother in fairly humble circumstances, and in the last decade he has almost ascended to the pinnacle of national politics. In a very short space of time, he has assimilated himself to the political class, whose attitudes he learned partly at Harvard and Columbia and partly in Springfield as a state

legislator. Because Obama's rise has been so swift, he must keep speaking their language to signal his full belonging to that class.

Such is the essence of snobbery: it is most acute in those who have recently acquired their higher status, while those who have enjoyed the same status longer have more luxury to play at being tribune of the people. Ironically, it is his very newness to the national political scene, which many regard as one of Obama's refreshing traits, that compels him, far more than his opponents, to conform to conventional expectations in what he says and believes. This means that Obama will always be more constrained, and will inevitably appear more elitist, than his rivals because he cannot afford to compromise the high status he has achieved.

It is doubly ironic, even tragic, that Obama has also had to combat skepticism about his patriotism in recent months, since nothing could attest more fully to his complete assimilation to the political and cultural norms of American government and academia than his sociological distance from and pity for small-town America. If Obama can be cast in some way as "post-American" or a "globalized American," this is only because he has adapted to a class dominated by what David Brooks called the "progressive globalists," who fill the leadership of both parties. Obama's elitism and his perceived alienation from

Middle America are both results of his successful integration into the political establishment.

What we have seen with the controversy over Obama's elitism is a well-entrenched section of the political class turning Obama's very imitation of their attitudes against him. If he had not fully embraced these attitudes, he would be ridiculed as an *arriviste* and a gate-crasher. Worse, he would be denounced by elite commentators with the only insult more politically damaging than "elitist"—"populist." The difference in the degree of hostility from most commentators is this: rivals and pundits mock you as an elitist to damage you, but it is still a sign of acceptance that you are a competitor who belongs in the arena with them, while the charge of "populist" is intended to stigmatize you as dangerous, crazy, or both.

Obama has been fortunate, therefore, to be described as an elitist and not as a populist. Elitists are at least allowed to reach the general election; populists must be stopped or politically crippled long before that. Of course, there is a relationship between what the candidate proposes to change and the use of the different names. Those who actually threaten the *status quo* in some meaningful way are deemed populist and driven to the margins, while those who represent an acceptable alternative are merely elitist. Politicians who are a little too visibly elitist are simply undesirable for other members of the elite because they remind everyone else of disparities in power and wealth. Populists, on the other hand, represent—in establishment minds at least—a real danger to their position. ■

Arts & Letters

FILM

[*Iron Man*]

Full Metal Jacket

By Steve Sailer

IN CONTRAST TO the *manga*-addicted Japanese, Americans don't like comic books much. Sales have been sluggish since the collapse of the speculator-driven collectible bubble in the early 1990s. The fundamental flaw of comic books is that by using pictures to dispense with time-consuming verbal descriptions, they quickly chew through countless plot permutations, exhausting all but the most obsessive readers.

What Americans like instead, as the \$100-million opening weekend for the entertaining "Iron Man" shows, are comic-book movies. Two hours is the right amount of time for the tragic death of the parents of the superhero, his dawning awareness of his powers for good and evil, a bruising fight with an older supervillain in the skies over a megalopolis, and an epilogue setting up the sequel.

Granted, Hollywood is scraping the bottom of the comic-book barrel with Iron Man, a name more famous as the title of the thudding heavy-metal classic by Black Sabbath. (Was the song inspired by the superhero? Nobody seems to know—you try getting a straight story out of an elderly English rock star about what he was thinking in 1970.) Yet Iron Man's obscurity didn't prove a marketing problem because, as

Canadian journalist Colby Cosh has noted, "The public adores the familiar, even if all they know is that it should be familiar."

Iron Man was dreamed up in 1963 by Stan Lee as Marvel Comics's answer to DC's Batman. Like Bruce Wayne, Tony Stark lacked superpowers, but he made up for it by being a billionaire playboy inventor à la Howard Hughes. That was an era of engineer heroes, such as Hyman Rickover of the nuclear navy, Wernher von Braun of the space program, and Kelly Johnson of Lockheed's Skunk Works. In contrast, today's most celebrated tech tycoon is Apple's Steve Jobs, whose specialty is simplifying user interfaces (while the boring manufacturing is subcontracted off somewhere overseas).

Rather than fighting crime like Wayne, Stark's focus was foreign policy. While prototyping a new Stark Industries weapons system for our advisers in Vietnam, he was captured by "red guerilla tyrant" Wong Chu, who put him to work building a superweapon for some nefarious purpose. Stark, though, secretly banged together a robot exoskeleton (probably inspired by the mobile infantry power suits in Robert A. Heinlein's 1959 novel *Starship Troopers*) and smashed his way out.

The movie is transplanted to Afghanistan in 2008. The villain isn't the Taliban (there are a lot of Muslim potential ticket-buyers out there), but a freelance warlord who has assembled a multicultural gang of mercenaries from across the Eurasian steppe, from Hungary to Mongolia, to rebuild the empire of Genghis Khan. (How using Stark's high-tech weaponry to pillage one mud-brick village in the Hindu Kush gets him closer to world domination isn't explained.)

In most action movies, the bad guys' henchmen are suicidally devoted to the cause, even if they are just in it for money. In a clever touch of realism in this consistently enjoyable film, however, the hired goons are just bullies who flee in terror from what looks like a man wrapped in pick-up truck bumpers.

Soon the engineering genius is back in his workshop in his John Lautner-designed Iron Mansion in Malibu, building a more advanced suit to track down who is bootlegging his firm's weaponry. "Iron Man" is a refreshing throwback to the pre-virtual age when heroes forged tools out of metal, rather than just tapping on a computer keyboard. It's the most loving tribute to machinery since James Cameron vanished.

Casting the twice-imprisoned Robert Downey Jr. as the hero was a risk because the leading man in a \$186 million production must be insurable, and his work ethic should provide a model for the crew. That's one reason Cameron made Arnold Schwarzenegger a huge star, even though he can barely speak English. Downey, in contrast, is blessed with the most nimble articulation of any American actor since James Woods. He could whip through "Hamlet" in three hours. Indeed, one of the more intriguing what-ifs of recent American theater history was the drug-cancelled 2001 production of "Hamlet," in which Downey was to be directed by his friend Mel Gibson.

Sober for half a decade, Downey remains the master of the throwaway line. Watch how lightly he tosses off his inevitable last line, "I am Iron Man," just before Black Sabbath's power chords clang over the credits. ■

Rated PG-13 for some intense sequences of sci-fi action and violence and brief suggestive content.

BOOKS

[*Against Happiness: In Praise of Melancholy*, Eric G. Wilson, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 176 pages]

Ode to Joy

By Peter W. Wood

IN A VILLAGE JUNK STORE in the Adirondacks, I recently found a 1950 jack-in-the-box sitting in its original paper carton. It was perfectly preserved except that the little crank to wind out pop-goes-the-weasel was defunct. Wind it as you would, the box was silent and jack was permanently immured. Naturally, I bought it.

If one goes searching for evidence of wistful melancholia in American life, junk stores are a good place to begin. Here are the campaign buttons of candidates who paraded into dust; there, the chipped china and tarnished silverware of Thanksgivings past; bins of long-unplayed phonograph records; keepsakes transformed into *memento mori*.

Discarded toys, however, contain the purest concentrated pathos: rosebuds shoved into the furnace of time.

Americans as a whole may be punishingly ignorant of history, but we love the flotsam of the past, as evidenced by the thousands of junk stores and antiquaries, not to mention flea markets, garage sales, and eBay auctions. Bargain-hunting hardly begins to explain this. Junk-store commerce is mainly about the sentiments that objects conjure from us, from nostalgia to irony, touched everywhere with a sunbeam of sadness.

Eric Wilson's new book *Against Happiness* is the work of a cultural critic who has somehow missed all this. Surrounded by the vast landscape of melancholic remembrance in American life, he sees only a nation in love with cheap and superficial contentment.

He directs his blowtorch of disappointment at his countrymen for 151

pages—shorter than a migraine but perhaps long enough. The main thread of his two-stranded book is Wilson's argument that melancholy is a creative force in human life and, by fleeing from it into Happy Meals, Prozac, and mere consumerism, we flatten our souls. The other, more elusive thread isn't an argument at all but a tone of luxuriant disdain for the American character. Wilson's America is a place of giddy stupidity, in love with shopping and deaf to suffering—including our own.

This is not just an indictment of contemporary Americans. His critique stretches back beyond the credit-fueled consumption orgies of our day and even the bubbles of yesteryear. He takes it all back to the Pilgrims on the *Mayflower*. We may be accustomed to seeing those dour religious recusants as the very embodiment of melancholic exile, performing their "errand in the wilderness," but no, says Wilson, "they believed that America, that fresh and innocent country, would fulfill all their desires for religious bliss." Wilson misreads Pilgrim theology, which trusted in the bliss of the world to come rather than the bliss of New England winters, but no matter. His point is simply that Americans have been seeking the life of Riley from the get-go. Ben Franklin also gets a whipping for encouraging Americans to practice optimistic thrift, though it is a bit hard to tell which Wilson dislikes more: the optimism or the aspiration for material success.

Wilson spots one more original sin in the founding of America. When Jefferson put the words "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," into the Declaration, he was adjusting John Locke's phrase of 1690: "life, liberty, and property." As Wilson sees it, this wasn't so much a change as a euphemism. The wording "secretly" connects pursuing happiness with seeking property, as if "the true road to earthly joy is through the accumulation of stuff." Apparently, ever since, Americans have been in on the secret. Though it is "hidden" in the Declaration of Independence, "many folks past and present" understood it.

America "was and still is the place where one can find happiness through acquisition." This kind of glib judgment is, unfortunately, the bedrock of Wilson's analysis. He can't or won't see "the accumulation of stuff" in relation to the other ways we pursue happiness, such as marriage, family, religion, education, friendship, the arts, charity, and service. He is even blank to such pursuits of happiness as moving on, hitting the road, or building yourself a cabin in the woods.

Perhaps if you are writing a short book denouncing society's fondness for flimsier pleasures, you are entitled to exaggerate. Yet even allowing for overstatement, Wilson presents an image of contemporary America that I find unrecognizable. A year ago, I published a book that also attempted to take the emotional temperature of America, but what I reported in *A Bee in the Mouth: Anger in America Now* stands in odd contrast to Wilson's image of a land of bovine contentment. It is as though we had visited the same country and come away reporting opposite accounts. In Wilson's view, contemporary Americans are blandly nonconfrontational, anesthetized to existential realities, fearful of anything that jars them loose from the routine, soothing fakeness of manufactured comfort.

In *A Bee in the Mouth*, by contrast, I argue that contemporary Americans are gripped by the anxiety to discover their authentic "selves." The older American ethic of emotional self-control has been surpassed by a new cultural edict: Express yourself! And the most empowering, authentic-feeling form of expression many Americans can reach is anger. Far from being blandly nonconfrontational, we have become a nation of chip-on-our-shoulder swaggerers. The anger that bubbles up from the expressive individualism of our age is frequently unprovoked, or at least under-provoked, and it relishes its own occasions, showing off our mastery of contempt for others through practiced vituperation. It is on the Left (think Daily Kos), the Right

(think talk radio), in our sports (since McEnroe), our movies (satirized in "Anger Management"), popular entertainment ("Rosie vs. Donald"), our private lives, even our child rearing ("grrrrl power").

Possibly there is some way to reconcile Wilson's lament that Americans are just too damn happy with my account that we have de-stigmatized anger to the point where we are seldom so enraptured as when we are enraged. But let's not paper over the differences. Wilson is an English professor who supports his view with reflections on Keats, Beethoven, Blake, and—when he is reaching for the near present—Bruce Springsteen, Joni Mitchell, and Yoko Ono: melancholics all, their creative spirit liberated by a willingness to touch the darker depths of the soul. I, on the other hand, am an anthropologist trying to trace a profound change in American culture that we have no easy way to talk about.

Wilson thinks that our aversion to life-enhancing melancholy goes back to Plymouth Rock and Pilgrims all too eager to see the sunny side of life. I think this historical and cultural nonsense. Americans, like all humanity, have always lived in the shadow of the fear of death, and life is always a checkered story. The important difference between then and now is that somewhere in the middle of the last century, we began to shuck off the governing ideas that we owe it to others to restrain ourselves and that those who abandon themselves to their impulses are unworthy. The mid-century popularization of the Freudian idea that repression will come back as neurosis; the post-war migration to America of the existential creed that we combat the nothingness of life with strenuous assertion of our authentic selves; the rise of a feminist movement that incorporated both psychoanalytic and existential themes—a synthesis exemplified in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*; the early stirring of the counterculture in figures such as Allen Ginsberg, whose angry *Howl* was first heard in 1955, are mileposts of this transformation from a

nation that exalted a slow-to-anger ethic to one that now celebrates it's-cool-to-be-angry.

I have a snide Happy Bunny button that declares, "Your anger makes me happy." The target market for Happy Bunny products is adolescent girls. I suspect this isn't the bland happiness that Wilson thinks is corroding our melancholic edge, but it is indeed acidic. There is this much to say for Wilson's thesis: the "pursuit of happiness" is no stand-alone prescription for a worthy life. The Founders never imagined, though, that it would be understood as a way of blotting out the complications of existence or as a license for lifestyles focused on cannabis or harder stuff. Jefferson didn't write, "Follow your bliss."

Wilson thus has a point of sorts about some Americans being too easily pleased and missing the mountain peaks of aesthetic or spiritual exhilaration for contentment in the shopping mall. But I would say it is a small point that he exaggerates into an encompassing picture. Wilson in effect blames Americans for not sharing his taste for the High Romantic, with its sublime highs and lows. Well, OK. We generally don't live our lives in the emotional tenor of Keats or Beethoven. That said, many Americans do shape their lives around aspirations to the sublime. Wilson seems not to register the millions of Americans testing themselves on weekends by mountain climbing, deep-sea diving, and jumping out of airplanes, as well as the millions more whose religious aspirations take them on profound journeys.

But this is to treat Wilson's book as though it were seriously argued, and that is probably a mistake. *Against Happiness* is really more of a poetic effusion than an attempt at cogent criticism. The style resembles a dense essay by Emerson, in which nearly every sentence must be re-read and weighed. You can tell by the bibliographic notes at the end that Wilson can, in fact, write a straightforward declarative sentence, so the convoluted text of the book has to be

taken as deliberate reaching for a manner that will demonstrate what a proponent of robust melancholy should read like.

It is prose not for the fainthearted. Almost every paragraph has at least one sentence spitting out alliteration, swooning in assonance, reaching for the highest rhetorical apple on the tree. While I could glide past some of this, on occasion I had to put the book down until I stopped laughing: "poems more beautiful than the quiet cruising of devious sharks and symphonies more sonorous than those songs of the aloof birds of summer." And I am still not fully recovered from Wilson's lament for the good old days in the Big Apple: "As late as the eighties and early nineties Times Square was a seedy synecdoche of all that was glorious and grimy about New York City. One could around Forty-second Street encounter a seductive mixture of divas and drugs, gloriously dilapidate buildings and grim rings of illegal sex."

He proffers prating pronouncements of pismire presumption—two can play this game—when he writes, "[Coleridge] in his sadness offered a healing and a hope far more capacious and powerful than the paltry poultices and promises of the merely happy."

One reason to buy *Against Happiness* is for the sheer unintended comedy of the prose. I don't want to go overboard making fun of the book. Clearly Wilson is earnest in his thesis and has labored hard to achieve an intensity of presentation. But it happens that his argument is weak and his writing comes off mostly as straining after gnats. On both scores, the book defeats its purpose. I come away with renewed appreciation for the happiness that America does make possible and a slightly guilty conscience for having such a good time at the expense of Professor Wilson's gloom. ■

Peter W. Wood is executive director of the National Association of Scholars and author of A Bee in the Mouth: Anger in America Now.

[*Heads in the Sand: How the Republicans Screw Up Foreign Policy and Foreign Policy Screws Up the Democrats*, Matthew Yglesias, Wiley, 272 pages]

Liberalism's World Wide Web

By Austin Bramwell

THE TYPICAL CITIZEN, Joseph Schumpeter once observed, drops to a lower level of mental performance as soon as he starts thinking about politics. The typical pundit, one could add, drops to a lower level of mental performance as soon as he starts thinking about foreign policy. In domestic affairs, the height of sophistication is to eschew labels, transcend ideology, and admit that diverse problems call for diverse solutions. In foreign policy, by contrast, unifying ideologies are not just tolerated but *de rigueur*. The way of the distinguished commentator on foreign affairs is to reduce all problems to a single solution—realism, neoconservatism, internationalism, isolationism—while assuming that one's opponents do the same.

Matthew Yglesias has more native intelligence than the typical pundit. Nonetheless, his first book, *Heads in the Sand*, is not a sound guide. Yglesias urges "liberal internationalism"—defined as a policy of "strengthening, expanding and deepening international institutions in order to foster cooperation against common problems and to bring the globe closer to the long held liberal ideal of a world governed by a reasonably just, well-enforced set of rules"—as the cure for our woes abroad. Unfortunately, he barely finds time in this slim volume to argue for this approach or to answer the most obvious objections.

To start, the United States flouts international norms and institutions with some regularity. Yglesias credits the American-led defense of Kuwait in 1990 with establishing "a new, long-dreamed-of norm—the principle that aggressive

war would actually be repulsed by concerted international action." Not 14 years later, the United States violated this norm by launching an aggressive war of its own. (Bush apologists prefer to call the Iraq invasion a "preventive" war, but as all wars of aggression prevent some possible threat or other, preventive war cannot be distinguished from outright aggression.) Meanwhile, as Yglesias takes care to establish, policymakers in both major American political parties support aggressive wars under some circumstances even when opposed by international bodies. Neither the United States nor any other nation is likely to rely upon norms or institutions that do not actually constrain the most powerful international actors.

In confessing his faith in norms and institutions, Yglesias seems to assume that nations will act on knowledge that they do not actually have. Presumably—although Yglesias does not say so—the mechanism whereby international norms arise has something to do with an expectation of reciprocity: if the United States demonstrates that it will respect the

UN approval. It was not the United States, you see, that bombed Serbia but the "international" institution of NATO. Fine, but for liberal internationalism to work, other nations must accept this interpretation of the Kosovo War as obviously correct, when just as obviously it is not. By Yglesias's logic, one could also describe the invasion of Iraq as "internationalist" because the United States cobbled together a "coalition of the willing." Coalition members other than Britain contributed almost nothing to the U.S. effort, but non-U.S. NATO members contributed equally little to the 1999 Kosovo War. In the end, it is unclear whether Yglesias seeks anything more than an internationalist fig leaf for the policies he happens to prefer.

Yglesias offers the survival of NATO, even in the absence of a common Soviet threat, as proof of the durability of international institutions. Contrary to his claims, however, realists can and do explain NATO's survival and expansion since the Cold War. Non-U.S. NATO members have no other place to turn for their security, for no other alliance in

IT IS UNCLEAR WHETHER YGLESIAS SEEKS ANYTHING MORE THAN AN INTERNATIONALIST FIG LEAF FOR THE POLICIES HE HAPPENS TO PREFER.

wishes of other nations, then other nations will respect the wishes of the United States. Yet even if the United States did begin to behave in the way that Yglesias recommends, ages would pass before other nations began to expect the United States to act nonaggressively. By the time the U.S. created an expectation of nonaggression, it may have already lost its international pre-eminence.

Nor will other states necessarily recognize an impeccable record of deference when they see it. Foreign statesmen may be deceived. Even when they agree on the facts, they may still disagree on their proper interpretation. Yglesias labors, for example, to fit the 1999 Kosovo War into his internationalist framework, even though the United States initiated the intervention without

Europe could rival the power of NATO. Realist theory predicts such "bandwagoning" behavior. As for the United States, it admittedly does not realize any strategic benefit from alliances with the likes of Slovakia or Slovenia. At the same time, no NATO member currently faces a great power threat. For all we know, NATO in its present form is no more effective a security arrangement than the League of Nations. Derision of NATO has indeed become rather commonplace. The institution's survival may prove nothing more than the law of bureaucratic longevity.

In short, *Heads in the Sand* does not make a convincing defense of liberal internationalism. No matter: Yglesias also wants to show that his fellow Democrats hurt themselves politically by

abandoning liberal internationalism during the Bush years. He excoriates them for endorsing Bush's invasion of Iraq in the vain hope of neutralizing Republicans' advantage on national-security issues. In Yglesias's view, Democrats might have had a better chance of winning in 2002 and 2004 had they tried to stop the drive to war. Having voted to authorize the Iraq invasion, Democrats like John Kerry, for example, lacked the standing to blame Bush for the occupation after it turned sour.

As Yglesias admits, however, we cannot know whether opposition to Bush's policies would have improved Democratic electoral prospects. For all we know, complaisance on Iraq may have minimized Democratic losses in 2002 and 2004. At heart, Yglesias seems to believe—or simply assume—that candidates do better when they advance arguments recognizable to highly informed observers such as himself. But elections are decided by voters, not pundits. The architects and supporters of the Iraq invasion may never have agreed among themselves on the rationale—Saddam Hussein is a grave threat; no, he's vulnerable “low hanging fruit”—but the public suffered from no such confusion. Six months after the invasion, 70 percent of Americans believed that Saddam was personally involved in the 9/11 attacks. This belief, though false, furnished a perfectly sensible, patriotic rationale for the Iraq invasion.

In the face of such massive public ignorance, the Democrats probably could not have opposed the Iraq invasion and won. Voters do not pay close enough attention to politics to grasp the counter-intuitive conclusion that the president wanted to invade a country that had not attacked us. Indeed, at the highest levels of wisdom, perhaps we should be grateful that the public never quite got it. Greater public awareness of the reasons, or lack thereof, behind the invasion could have sparked a crisis of legitimacy. It may be better to continue to waste lives and treasure in Iraq than to allow our institutions to come under fundamental attack. The people must not know the truth. This anti-Dreyfusardist

argument may at least subconsciously drive those opinion-makers who continue to support the occupation.

Although Yglesias never completely repents of his faith in the Democratic Party, he otherwise takes a jaundiced view of post-9/11 America. He accurately observes that opinion-mongers of all stripes became obsessed after 9/11 with the threat of an anti-American far Left. Movement conservatives instinctively pounce on any evidence that confirms their conviction that liberals, leftists, and traditional conservatives hate America. But it wasn't just movement conservatives aggravating the panic. *The New Republic* ran an “idiocy watch” feature quoting anti-American figures who, as Yglesias says, were “completely irrelevant to actual U.S. policy debates.” Andrew Sullivan named a mock award for anti-Americanism in Susan Sontag's honor. Sontag's offense? Expressing the plausible if not accurate view that the 9/11 terrorists attacked America for its policies rather than its ideology. In the end, the anti-leftist panic failed to uncover more than a handful of pro-terrorist cranks—fewer, indeed, than one might have expected in a country of 300 million people.

Yglesias also bravely resuscitates the reputation of Howard Dean. In Yglesias's telling, Dean vaulted ahead of his rivals in the polls not because of his leftism—Dean started his campaign with a well-deserved reputation as a moderate—but because of his early skepticism about the Iraq invasion. Shortly after Colin Powell's February 2003 speech before the United Nations, Dean stated, “I was impressed not by the vastness of the evidence presented by the Secretary, but rather by its sketchiness.” He continued, “I am not among those who say that America should never use its armed forces unilaterally. ... In Iraq, I would be prepared to go ahead ... if it were clear the threat posed to us by Saddam Hussein was imminent, and could neither be contained nor deterred.” These are not the words of a pacifist or an angry leftist. Especially in hindsight, they sound very much like the counsels of prudence.

Dean's candor eventually proved his undoing. “The capture of Saddam Hussein,” he remarked in December 2003, “has not made Americans safer.” This “gaffe,” as it was called, led the Democrats to pick the ambiguously pro-war John Kerry over the antiwar Dean. Whatever Dean's flaws, he deserves credit for having the courage, almost alone among Democratic candidates in 2003, to speak the truth about Iraq.

The most disturbing irrationality after 9/11 emanated from the White House. We now know that the Bush administration rejected offers from Syria and Iran to assist in the fight against al-Qaeda. As Yglesias notes, the decision to rebuff these nations could not have made sense to administration officials unless they had already been planning regime change throughout the Middle East. The administration, in other words, was putting its dreams of regime change ahead of the fight against al-Qaeda. Now, lots of people really do believe that regime change in the Middle East will eventually cure terrorism (although no one has ever bothered to say how, exactly). Still, nobody ever hired a football coach who believed that the best way to win in the end would be to fall behind in the beginning. Measured by lives wasted, the Bush administration's winning-by-losing strategy in response to the 9/11 attacks is more infamous than the attacks themselves.

Critics will note that *Heads in the Sand* reads like one long blog post. Andrew Sullivan, Jonah Goldberg, Jonathan Chait, Peter Beinart, Ryan Lizza—all the world's leading bloggers make their way into the text as authorities or interlocutors. In some ways, Yglesias's enthrallment to the world of his fellow young punditry whizzes is a strength. To read *Heads in the Sand* is to relive recent political history almost as one experienced it the first time—surfing the internet, soaking up what famous people are saying. Yglesias answers the cravings of the political junkie. Whether he achieves any lasting insight is another question. ■

Austin Bramwell is a lawyer in New York City.

[*Under God: George Washington and the Question of Church and State*, Tara Ross & Joseph C. Smith Jr., Spence Publishing, 317 pages]

Faith of Our Father

By James P. Pinkerton

THE MOST REFRESHING thing about *Under God: George Washington and the Question of Church and State* is what is not found in its 317 pages. The foreign-born big names, many of whom never set foot in this country—but who are somehow presumed to know best by the American conservative intelligentsia—are all given a sabbatical by authors Tara Ross and Joseph C. Smith Jr.

Let's say, for the record, that Aquinas, Smith, Burke, von Mises, Hayek, Rand, and Strauss were mostly a fine bunch. But let's also note that many rightist scribblers today feel obligated—or inspired or peer-pressured or tenure-constrained—to leave textual offerings at the altar of foreign “greats” who were mostly oblivious to the key components of American exceptionalism.

Can't Americans have a scholarly book that explains the American political tradition in the voice of an American? Especially an American such as our first president, a man who combined words and deeds in ways that have so instructed and enlightened us?

And for those who like a debate, well, Americans can provide that, too. Thomas Jefferson, for example, had ideas very different from Washington about religion—even if, as we shall see, the differences have been greatly exaggerated in the centuries since.

In their own time, Washington and the Founders were mindful of their heritage and their history, but they were even more aware that they were creating something new—*novus ordo seclorum*, as it says on the dollar bill. In fact, these new Americans did a good job establish-

ing a mostly conservative self-governing republic that flourished before many of the most revered conservative luminaries were even born or had learned to say “United States of America” in English.

And nobody was more influential in early America than George Washington. He was perfectly articulate and persuasive to his fellow citizens, even though he never went to college, let alone grad school—an enduring source of inspiration, no doubt, to today's homeschoolers.

Of course, Washington and the Founders did have help. Let's not forget that other Latin motto on the reverse of the dollar bill, *annuit coeptis* “He has approved of our undertaking.”

But it's the real George Washington, the Washington of public and private faith, that historians have mostly not approved of. Authors Ross and Smith—lawyers in Dallas and Denver respectively—call attention to the obvious bias in *The Writings of George Washington From the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745-1799*, edited by John C. Fitzpatrick, completed in 1944, which fails to include many of Washington's letters to religious organizations. Even Washington's 1790 letter to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, R.I., a strong vindication of religious freedom written before the First Amendment was ratified, was buried deep in a footnote. Yet in that correspondence, the new president reminded American Jews that, in this new country, toleration was not an “indulgence” for the lucky or the connected but one of those “inherent natural rights” that patriots had died for. He also made plain that freedom for diverse religious practice is not to be confused with freedom from religious expression by public officials. And so the president closed his letter with an invocation to the Judeo-Christian God: “May the father of all mercies scatter light, and not darkness, upon our paths, and make us all in our several vocations useful here, and in His own due time and way everlastingly happy.”

The authors tell us that the public Washington was more religious than the private Washington. In private, for

example, he never referred to “Jesus” or “Jesus Christ” nor used such synonyms as “savior” or “redeemer.” They add, “There must have been some measure of deliberateness in his decisions to be publicly religious.”

So was Washington a Deist? A hypocrite? The authors don't claim to analyze his soul or psyche, but they remind us that Washington was, purely and simply, a public servant, who declared, “Let us raise a standard to which the wise and honest can repair, the rest is in the hands of God.”

Washington was definitely a man of faith. In 1755, during the French and Indian War, he was part of a military unit, led by British general Edward Braddock, which was mostly annihilated near Fort Duquesne. Washington survived—a miracle, and he knew it. As he wrote to his brother, John, “I am still in the land of the living by the miraculous care of Providence, that protected me beyond all human expectation; I had 4 Bullets through my coat, and two Horses shot under me yet escaped unhurt.”

Washington's faith became more public during the next phase of his career, as a member of Virginia's House of Burgesses. In 1774, after the British government retaliated for the Boston Tea Party by shutting down the Port of Boston, the Virginia legislature protested the British action, calling for a “day of Fasting, Humiliation, and Prayer, devoutly to implore the divine interposition, for averting the heavy Calamity which threatens Destruction to our civil Rights, and the Evils of civil War.” For his part, Washington not only voted for this resolution, but was also, according to a biographer, “determined to respect it literally and in spirit.”

The American commander kept the faith throughout the American Revolution. After one success in 1776, he reminded his subordinates that they should always be “remembering that upon the blessing of Heaven, and the bravery of the men, our Country only can be saved.” And so it was a no-brainer for General Washington to

endorse paid chaplains for the troops. In the words of an historian cited by the authors, "Washington seems never during his life to have questioned the relevance of organized religion to social order and morality He looked upon religion as indispensable to the morale, discipline, and good conduct of the men under his command."

Toward the end of the fighting, on Feb. 15, 1783, Washington issued this general order: "The Brigadiers and Commandants of Brigades [are] desired to give notice in their orders and to afford every aid and assistance in their power

ited from Europe. In 1790, he signed a law eliminating ecclesiastic jurisdiction over certain legal matters; as the authors explain, he was happy to strip away an "ancient form of clerical privilege from use in Federal jurisprudence." In other words, there would be plenty of religion in American life, but no official religion.

The following year, the states ratified the First Amendment, which declared, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." President Washington had no objection to these

In other words, Jews could keep their distinct faith, Quakers could keep theirs—during the Revolutionary War, Washington defended the right of Quakers to be pacifists—but America, overall, would keep a public faith.

How then did Thomas Jefferson's idea of a "wall of separation between Church & State" come to be seen by so many today as the "Constitutional" doctrine that should chase faith out of the public square altogether? That's an interesting question, mostly outside the scope of this book. But the authors note that Jefferson's words, expressed in a single letter to the Danbury Baptists, dated Jan. 1, 1802, were not anywhere close to what the American Civil Liberties Union would purport them to be.

The authors further add that Jefferson used those words only once in his life, in part because the phrase was poorly received; even the recipients didn't like the message. Ross and Shaw explain: "As a religious minority, the Danbury Baptists sought a government that respected freedom of conscience, of course, but they did not want a government that was *opposed* to religion."

Still, as we all know, various liberals and litigators have acted as if Jefferson's single utterance outweighed the vast volume of counter-thinking that long preceded the Danbury letter. The authors conclude, "Washington's opinions deserve at least as much attention as those of Jefferson."

Well, yes, indeed they do. Because, as Jefferson himself put it, when confronted with challenges, Americans don't need new ideas; they must instead rediscover the American mind. Ross and Smith have helped us to do just that, starting with one of greatest American minds, that of the eternal George Washington. ■

James P. Pinkerton is a contributor to the Fox News Channel and a fellow at the New America Foundation in Washington, D.C. He served in the White House under Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush.

ACUTELY CONSCIOUS THAT **HIS EVERY GESTURE AND WORD WOULD BE SETTING A PRECEDENT** FOR THE INFANT REPUBLIC, **WASHINGTON BOWED TO KISS THE BIBLE** ON WHICH HE SWORE HIS OATH OF OFFICE.

for the promotion of that public Homage and adoration which are due to the supreme being, who has through his infinite goodness brought our public Calamities and dangers ... very near to a happy conclusion."

Nothing changed when Washington became president. Acutely conscious that his every gesture and word would be setting a precedent for the infant republic, he bowed to kiss the Bible on which he swore his oath of office. In his inaugural address, Washington noted the great challenges facing the country, adding, "It would be peculiarly improper to omit in this first official act, my fervent supplications to that Almighty Being who rules over the Universe, who presides in the Council of Nations, and whose providential aids can supply every human defect, that his benediction may consecrate to the liberties and happiness of the People of the United States." The point was made: Washington did not insist that every American had to share his own public faith, but he did make clear that America's public life would be full of shared faith.

At the same time, however, the new president continued to peel back special legal privileges for religion inher-

words; as Ross and Smith explain, "Washington's actions over the course of the next five years would demonstrate his view that the amendment did not change the propriety of the national government's support for certain religious activity." For example, in his 1796 Farewell Address, the president summed up his view of the non-separation of church and state:

Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports Let it simply be asked: Where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths which are the instruments of investigation in courts of justice? And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.

Don't Sweat the TSA

Has anyone noticed that the various “anti-terror” measures we see everywhere are just security theater—that is, utterly ineffective for their purported purpose and

staged for political reasons?

On Washington's subway, the PA system admonishes passengers over and over to watch each other and report any unusual behavior to Metro personnel. “Let's be prepared, not scared,” the recording says, the phrase sounding as if bought from an ad agency. We are to watch for unattended parcels and so on. Nobody, of course, pays the slightest attention.

This mummerly of watchfulness sounds like a security measure but isn't. Report strange behavior on an urban subway? At 1 a.m.? You see paranoid schizos talking with their little voices, swarthy men speaking unknown languages, bearded young wearing Che T-shirts. Any terrorist not still in a garage band would of course be careful to look normal. They are not stupid.

At rush hour, when a terrorist would strike, the system is a madhouse. Suppose that in a jammed car of irritated people you see someone “behaving strangely.” You get off at the next stop and find a guard, by which time the train has left. You tell him, “Hey, I saw someone strange.” “What do you mean, strange?” he asks. “Well, he kept kind of looking around, and I think he was sweating.”

What does the guard do? Sound an alarm, shut down the Metro, and call in SWAT teams to look for a sweating guy? Hardly. He will brush you off.

Report unattended packages at rush hour? Oh sure, that will work. Upon seeing the orphaned briefcase, do you

shriek “Bomb!” in a packed car, whereupon three people are crushed to death in the panic, the system shuts down, and you go to jail when the explosive turns out to be a bag lunch and a report on locust infestations in Chad?

Of course, any terrorist with a solitary functioning neuron would use a three-minute fuse so that when his bomb went off between Rosslyn and Pentagon Station he would be walking down Wilson Boulevard.

This comedy never stops. I recently read that police armed with “machine guns”—presumably meaning submachine guns—will patrol the subway system of New York. What could be a better idea? Half-trained rentacops opening up with automatic weapons in a rush-hour mob. At what? Someone acting strangely? Sweating, maybe? Automatic weapons are totally useless against suicide bombers or package-leavers. What then are they for?

I see that Amtrak stations on the D.C.-NYC corridor will shortly be visited without notice by teams that will randomly search waiting passengers. Oh, splendid. It's rush hour. Thousands jam the station. Let's assume our clowns search 2 percent of these people. The terrorist has one chance in 50 of being caught. How appallingly secure.

The funniest part is this: if a passenger refuses to be searched, his ticket will be refunded and he will have to leave the station. This ensures that a terrorist won't be caught. He will simply go to the next station and... boom.

Most of the security at airports is equally pointless. Today everybody knows that if you buy a one-way ticket, you will be hassled endlessly by marginally competent TSA Nazis amazed that people actually have to pay attention to them. Any terrorist will have a roundtrip ticket, but if you fly to Boston to take a job, you will be bullied unmercifully.

Baggage is not inspected for explosives until after the passenger has entered a crowded terminal. For purposes of getting publicity and shutting down the airlines, a terminal is as good a target as a plane. And so on.

No, I'm not giving ideas to terrorists. Everything I've said is obvious. Ask any sophomore in high school.

What then are the reasons behind all of this? Two are money and turf. Homeland Security is now a huge agency providing lots of jobs for air marshals, security screeners, and bureaucrats. It also hands out fortunes to companies that design explosives-sniffers and X-ray machines. It is a bonanza. The trough is open for business.

But those at the top are smart enough to know that this is only theater. What is the underlying purpose? To frighten the public into supporting the president's wars?

Or is the aim, as the more paranoid have it, to train the public to accept unrestrained police powers? If so, it is working. We now know better than to question the attitude of a TSA goon as we will miss our flight—something they know and use.

Everything about you is now the business of Homeland Security, and there is no recourse. Carry a book on the Taliban in your carry-on luggage? God help you. ■

“Military action will not last more than a week.”

—Bill O'Reilly, January 23, 2003

“Major combat operations in Iraq have ended....The United States and our allies have prevailed.”

—President
George W. Bush,
May 2, 2003

Collected together for the first time ever—the definitive, footnoted, hilarious-but-depressing compilation of quotations from “experts” who were completely wrong about the Iraq War.

Wherever books are sold.

 **SIMON & SCHUSTER**
PAPERBACKS
A CBS COMPANY

www.simonsays.com

